MAY 1981 NUMBER 39

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THE SPACE GAMER

THE MAGAZINE OF ADVENTURE GAMING

SPECIAL COMPUTER ISSUE

PLAYING *THE WARP FACTOR*

COMPANY REPORT:
STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS
LORD BRITISH SPEAKS
COMPUTERS TO GO
THE BEEP-BOOP MENACE
TRIPLANETARY SCENARIO

RUMORS IN *TRAVELLER*
THE MORROW PROJECT
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IN THIS ISSUE

We got a number of favorable comments on our first "special computer issue" eight months ago – so here we go again. In general, the response to 'theme' issues has been good; you can look for more of them.

Depending on how you count, we have six or nine computer-game items in this issue. That ought to be enough to satiate most of the people who have a disc-drive where their heart should be. Other features include a story by Timothy Zahn (who is getting to be a regular both here and in *Analog*); a *Triplanetary* scenario to go with the story; a strategy article for *Ice War*; a *Traveller* piece; and, for the fantasy fans, the Magic Contest winners and Lewis Pulsipher's discourse on traps.

And, as you can see, we managed to keep it at 40 pages again this issue. The advertisers are the ones making it possible – let them know where you read about their products.

Until next month, then.

–Steve Jackson

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THE SPACE GAMER (ISSN 0194-9977, USPS 434-250) is published monthly by The Space Gamer, 7207 Onion Crossing Dr., Austin, TX 78744. Second class postage paid at Austin, TX. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Space Gamer, P.O. Box 18805, Austin, TX 78760.

All material is copyright 1981 by *The Space Gamer*. All rights reserved.

Printed in U.S.A. by Futura Press, Austin.

Subscription rates, as of 4-7-81:

In the United States – one year (12 issues) $21.00; two years (24 issues) $39.00. A lifetime subscription is $250. Outside the U.S. – please add $5 per year for surface mail. Airmail rates vary by country – please write for your current airmail rate. International rates subject to change as postal rates change. NOTE: All payments MUST be in U.S. dollars, made by International Money Order or checks drawn on a U.S. bank.

Where We're Going

Been a frustrating month around here. Not that everything has gone wrong – but too many things have gone not-quite-right. I can't decide whether to scream or just regress into infancy. I think the latter course would be advisable. The writing style is easier, anyway:

See the new issue of *Space Gamer*. It has just come back from the printers. Steve and Forrest are very proud of it. They are reading it. Read, Steve and Forrest, read.

Look, Steve and Forrest, look. There is a column missing from the survey. There is a typo in the contest. Isn't that funny?

Look at Steve and Forrest beat their heads against the walls. They are wondering why they didn't study accounting instead. They should know there is no accounting for people like them. Look, look.

* * *

See the Postal Service. See the nice trucks and boxes and offices full of baggage smashers. Look, look. There goes another package of *Space Gamers*. Smash, postman, smash.

Look, look. See the bag of *Space Gamers*? Shall we delay them a month like we usually do? How about two months?

Oh, look. See the pretty ad? The ad is for *Cardboard Heroes*. Steve thinks that we will delay this magazine a month like we usually do. Let's fool Steve. Steve will appreciate the joke. Let's get every one of these suckers delivered this week. Then everybody will answer the ad. Fun, fun.

* * *

See Denis paint. Paint, Denis, paint. Denis is painting *Cardboard Heroes*. Denis is two weeks behind schedule. Paint, Denis, paint. Paint, Denis, paint. *Paint, Denis, paint!* Remember, they have to be perfect. See Steve scream. Aaaaaaaaah!

* * *

Look, look. See Chad and Aaron. Chad and Aaron have a new jacket for Steve. It is white. See the funny jacket. Okay, guys, this has gone far enough. I'm better now, honest. Look, look. Steve is all better. Really. . .

* * *

Thanks. I needed that.

* * *

As you may have gathered, the *Heroes* are a little late and the magazines carrying the announcement traveled (for once) quite quickly. I'm writing this on April 1, which gives me a perfect out if this prediction turns out wrong – but I *think* we'll still ship the new *Heroes* in April, which puts us just barely on schedule. However, we didn't intend to have anyone waiting more than 2-3 weeks between sending in their money and getting their *Heroes*. Gripe, gripe. As for the other projects:

CAR WARS is in almost-final form. It has gone through two successful pre-publication tournaments – one at Owlcon and one at Aggiecon. As we hoped, it definitely takes over the players' minds. By next week we will have gotten the final typeset version worked out, and Denis will be working on the cars. (This one will have *full-color* auto pictures on the counters.)

VAMPIRE now gets off the shelf and onto the typewriter. I'm looking forward to a couple of solid eight-hour rule-drafting sessions; we know how the game works, it's just a matter of detail.

Look for both of these games by late May or mid-June, if all goes well.

* * *

That makes it time to start thinking of the next batch of projects. One item we've been brainstorming for the past few days is a set of fantasy-game floor plans: a set of rooms in standard sizes that you

Next Issue

Issue 40 will be a special Traveller issue with a new space combat system;

A game account by Marc Miller;

Jack Vance's "Planet of Adventure" done up complete with maps, aliens and scenarios;

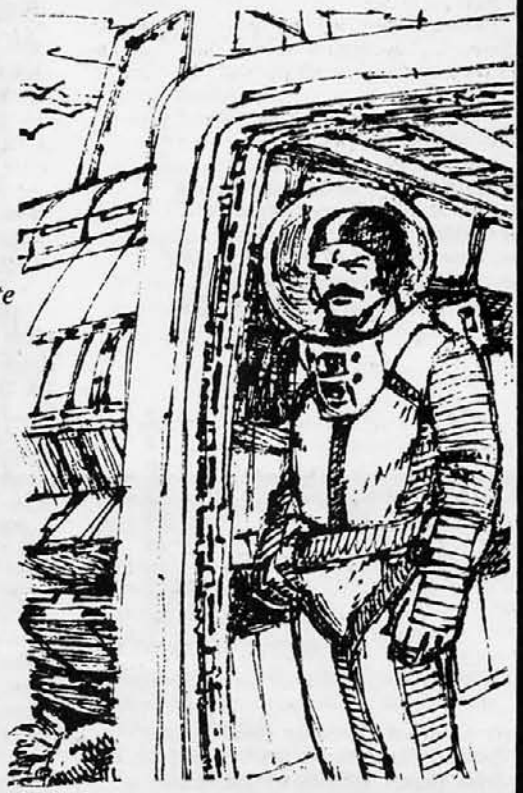
A featured review of Triplanetary;

The winners of the nonhuman race contest;

Also, a featured review of Chaosium's Dragon Pass;

Our cumulative index;

And some sufficiency of capsule reviews.



could lay on the table to aid in play. Requirements: (1) Each set would need to be pretty big – say, 35-40 rooms each, with rooms from 1" x 1" all the way to 8" x 10". (2) They have to look nice – realistic stone flooring, in color, with a grid pattern and code lettering overall to let GMs code locations in each room. (3) They ought to be *erasable*, so a GM can draw new walls or doors as he likes (in grease pencil, for instance) and wipe them off again. (4) They have to be *cheap* – less than $5 per set.

If we can pull this off, you'll hear about it. The product as described would be the best thing on the market – better than the cheap stuff, much cheaper than the other "pretty" alternatives. If we can't do it at a reasonable price, though, we won't do it at all.

Other upcoming products:

GAME DESIGN: THEORY AND PRACTICE. The series of TSG articles is winding down – only two or three more, I think. Once the series has finished, we'll re-edit all the articles, add new information, and publish them in book form. It might even be a two-volume job. I've got some tables and information that would bore about half of you people out of your minds – so they won't do for TSG – but they might make a *very* useful for-designers-only book. Look for the first volume about Origins, and the second one (if ever) sometime later.

THE BEST OF TSG, VOLUME ONE. Eventually, I want to reprint all the "good stuff" from the early, out-of-print issues of TSG. The project is underway but moves very slowly. Maybe by Origins, but probably not.

CARDBOARD HEROES, SETS 5-7. Available in 4 months, give or take. Right now it looks like Set 5 will be Undead, and sets 6 and 7 will be Monsters . . . basilisks, golems, elementals, octopi, were-creatures, demons, and other man-sized nasties. Unless, of course, we get something else drawn first. Suggestions appreciated, as always.

NEW GAMES. We're working on several. Right now I don't know which ones are going to get to completion first, so I'll keep my mouth shut.

I think that should do it for this month. Wish us well. See Steve mutter . . .

– Steve Jackson

GAME MASTER

GAME MASTER exists to answer questions on your favorite games. If you have a rules question or play problem, send it in. Questions to be answered will be chosen on the basis of general interest. They will be first referred to the game publisher or designer. If no response is received, GAME MASTER will offer its own interpretation of the rule. Sorry – no individual replies are possible.

Traveller

As an RPG character-player-turned-game-referee, I have a few questions concerning GDW's *Traveller*. Say, for instance, a party of adventurers is exploring an installation. For exploration purposes, how would one determine how far a character could move in one turn? Also, how do you determine the passage of game time? In D&D, one turn equals ten minutes of game time, with the average human being able to move 120' in the same time. I wasn't sure if *Traveller* was run on the same basis or not. Could you please help me with this problem?

– Patrick V. Reyes

GDW's Loren Wiseman replies: Is that really the movement rate for D&D? That's FIVE SECONDS PER FOOT. What are they moving through, chocolate syrup?

In **Traveller**, *turns are 15 seconds long, and a character can move 45 meters in one turn (that's a brisk walk). Running, characters can move twice that. Deductions should be made from this rate according to the type of terrain covered, number of endurance points used up, encumbrance, and so on. For 15mm miniatures, we suggest a scale of 1 inch to three meters.*

DragonQuest

Book 1: Why is it harder to be a halfling than to be an elf or dwarf, if halflings are the more numerous of the three? Also, on page 24, section 20, it states that "A character can achieve Rank with bare hands in the same manner as for a weapon." Yet, nowhere in the rules does it give an experience point cost for achieving such Rank.

Book 2: On page 12, the Spell of Invisibility (G-8) does not have a Base Chance given. What should it be?

Book 3: On page 4, section 48.4, the Base Chance for all skills is listed as (69+3/Rank)%. As this makes skills harder to use as Rank is achieved, I assume that it should be (69+(3x Rank)%). Is this correct? Sections 50.4 (page 5) and 50.8 (page 6) each give a different formula for the cost of a poison. Which, if either, is correct, and what should the general cost of a prepared poison be (to someone who is neither an Alchemist or an Assassin)? Does SPI really expect players with Astrologer characters to slaughter a goat in the GM's living room (to read its entrails)? In section 58.2 (page 12), the rallying ability of the military scientist is given as 30-(5xRank). Should this be 30+5xRank? Should the Running speeds in section VIII be in feet or yards (it says feet, but yards seem to be more accurate).

General: When will the errata for the first edition of *DragonQuest* be available, and how can we get it? When will the revised edition be out?

– William A. Peterson

DragonQuest *design chief David Ritchie answers:*

1. In answer to your question concerning the comparative difficulty of becoming a halfling in **DragonQuest**, *I would point out that while halflings may outnumber dwarves and elves in terms of total population in a* **DragonQuest** *world, halfling* **adventurers** *will not be strewn too thickly upon the ground. The species is supposedly given to the leading of lives of quiet mediocrity,* **not** *to the doing of great deeds and the seeking out of the dangerous and the unknown. Accordingly, if you want to be a halfling, your chances of overcoming your nature and going out on "adventures" (nasty things) will be smaller than for members of other races.*

2. The Experience Multiple for unarmed combat proficiency is 150. There is a limit of 20 to the Rank achievable with bare hands (i.e. it is treated as a Skill).

3. The Base Chance for a Spell of Invisibility (G-8) is 45%.

4. The entire passage in 48.4 is incorrect. The passage **should** *read as follows: A character usually has a chance of failure when using a non-magical skill. Unless the ability is described as an exception to this rule, the maximum chance to succeed with it is never greater than (90+Rank)%. A character always fails to use an ability if the roll is greater than the modified chance or 100 (regardless of Rank).*

5. Actually both are correct. The cost listed in 50.4 is the cost of all materials and substances necessary to manufacture a single dose of poison (a 50% markup will give you the cost to purchase such an item from an Alchemist). The cost listed in 50.8 is for the prime ingredient in such poisons and each item (poison sac or plant) will produce D10-1 doses of poison. Note that these are averages, however. An extremely potent, but very rare, substance (the poison sac of a Black Widow, for example) will bring a higher price than something which is almost as potent but very common.

6. On the subject of slaughtering goats, any sort of random system of fortune telling is preferable to turning the GM's livingroom into an abattoir. I suggest a set of tarot cards as being one of the most interesting and colorful ways of telling a fortune in a **DragonQuest** *campaign. It has the additional benefit of not being frowned on by either the Fund for Animals or the ASPCA.*

7. We misprinted the rallying ability of the Military Scientist, as you surmised. It **should** *be 30+(5xRank).*

8. All running speeds should be in yards. As you point out, yards is a more accurate measure in this case.

9. We now have first edition errata for **DragonQuest** *available which can be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed letter to me at SPI (257 Park Avenue South/New York, New York 10016). A revised version of one of the three books is being packaged in all* **DragonQuests** *currently being shipped and revisions are planned for the other two books as and when they individually come up for reprinting (probably by mid-summer). By early fall we expect to have all existing errata input directly in the rules.*

FANTASY WORLD

by Timothy Zahn

The battle had been short and furious, and now the last two enemy starships hovered like vultures just outside of blaster range. His fingers resting lightly on the control keys, John Davis had the eerie feeling that they were watching him, waiting for him to lower his guard before launching that final lethal attack. But he knew better than to be lulled, and even as he watched the blips began to move.

Inexperienced warriors usually wasted power by firing as soon as the targets were within range. John resisted that temptation and instead waited until the ships had committed themselves to definite attack trajectories. The first took a simple hyperbolic course, and John got it before it came within fifty thousand kilometers. The second's path was trickier, though, and John wasted two shots before realizing it was a logarithmic spiral. After that, calculating an intercept course was easy, and a single torpedo did the trick.

Leaning back in his chair, John stared at the empty screen with a sense of frustration. It had been too easy. Again.

Parker, the red-haired kid at the next terminal, glanced up and misinterpreted John's expression. " 'Smatter, Davis? They get you?"

"Don't be silly." Tapping a key, John watched as the computer printed his score.

Parker whistled. "Eighteen ships blasted in a minute and a half. And with only twenty-two shots and a third of your fuel. Boy, how gloomy do you look when you *lose* something?"

"You weren't paying attention yesterday, were you?"

"Yesterday? You mean – aw, you didn't bomb another chem test, did you?"

" 'Fraid so. You wouldn't want me to ruin my streak, would you?"

Parker shook his head. "I've never seen anyone as smart as you who has so much trouble with tests. How come?"

"I don't know," John shrugged, uncomfortable with the subject. "I freeze up whenever I'm going to be graded on something, I suppose. I've been like that since elementary school."

"Well, cheer up and look on the bright side. Computer games still aren't a required course."

"Very funny." John scowled at the screen. "They might as well be, though. It's getting to be as boring as rhet class. This is supposed to be one of the hardest games on the machine and I've already beaten it eight times."

"Running out of challenges, huh? Well, let's see. Have you tried *Cluster War*?"

"Yes. Also *Deep Probe, Alien Survival,* and *Invasion*. I can beat all of them practically blindfolded. I've even won *Suicide Attack* five times."

Parker shook his head in rueful admiration. "It's people like you that discourage all the rest of us. I haven't *ever* beaten *Suicide Attack*. Ah, I know – how about the new one on Index Four called *Blockade*?"

John frowned. "Never heard of it. Index Four, you say?"

Parker nodded. "I haven't tried it myself yet, but I hear it's one of those games where you wish you had a tree handy to bang your head against. Have fun." He

turned back to his own game.

"Thanks." John busied himself at the keyboard for a few moments, and soon the screen began to fill up with words.

Blockade: A Game Of Escape And Survival

You are trapped on a world of the double star Leix. A fleet of enemy fighters lies in orbit around the two stars, out of range of ground-based defenses. You must elude enemy attacks and reach the edge of the screen in order to win.

It sounded mildly interesting. John typed for the rules and read them with growing excitement. Everything had been set up with an eye toward realism: stellar masses, distances, and revolution speeds were carefully defined; ship capabilities in speed, weaponry, and defense were spelled out in detail. Even the drag effects of the stellar atmospheres had been included.

Altogether, the rules and control options took up six pages, and John took a few minutes after he finished reading to review them in his mind. Calling up the "game board," he studied the layout for a moment. His starting point, the rules said, was a planet of the smaller star, Leix B. That sun's red giant companion, Leix A, sat a few inches away on the screen, its atmosphere indicated by a hazy ring surrounding it. The enemy fighters were nowhere to be seen. More as an experiment than anything else, John launched a ship into a simple hyperbolic course.

Out of nowhere a ship appeared, moving on an intercept course. A dot moved between the blips, and John's ship flared and vanished. The fighter turned back and disappeared.

Frowning, John launched another ship . . . and another, and another. No matter what course was used one or more fighters always appeared and successfully intercepted the escaping craft. But where were they coming from? Or was that randomized?

He finally got it on the tenth shot. "Aha!" he muttered in triumph.

Parker looked up. "Win it already?"

"Hardly. I've figured out where these fighters are based. They're coming from the two Lagrangian points of the double star."

"I gather that's good?"

"At least I know where to watch for them. I still think it's cheating to let them vanish instead of going back to their nests, though."

Parker watched in silence as John launched another ill-fated ship. "Maybe the fighters aren't disappearing," he suggested. "Maybe they're just coasting, and are being considered as invisible when their drives are off."

"Let's see." John fired another ship, this time allowing it to coast after an initial impulse. Sure enough, the ship vanished; but as the attacking fighter neared its projected position, it reappeared and was quickly destroyed.

"What the hell?" Parker growled.

"I get it," John nodded. "The fighters' detection gear is good enough to pick me up if they come close, even when my drive is off."

"That's dirty pool. They at least should have warned you about that."

"Oh, I don't mind. It adds to the game."

John turned back to his keyboard. It was now going to be largely a matter of trial and error to find a path that would enable him to escape the fighters. For a moment he wished the game allowed the extra freedom of a third dimension, but immediately realized that wouldn't really help him much. Leaving the ecliptic plane would require too much of his drive and would therefore allow the fighters too much time to track him. What was needed was some path that could be neither tracked nor easily predicted. Settling himself more comfortably in front of the terminal, he set to work.

He had lost count of the number of ships the fighters had destroyed when he became aware of someone standing over him. He glanced up. "Oh, hi, Sandy."

"Hello, John." Her tone was cold enough to frost an orange grove. "Do you know what time it is?"

"I – aw, nuts, I'm sorry. We were going to the show tonight, weren't we? Can we still make it?"

"Not now. You know I hate coming in after a movie's started." She nodded at the screen. "What is it this time, *Invasion* or *Custer War*?"

"*Cluster*," he corrected automatically. "This is a new one called *Blockade*. I have to get a basically unarmed ship through a mess of enemy fighters –" He broke off his explanation at the look on her face. "C'mon, Sandy, I really am sorry. I got some homework done early and just stayed here to play a couple of games. Time just got away from me, that's all."

"It always does, John," she sighed, "and you always say you're sorry. But you never really are."

John felt his face getting red. "That's not fair," he complained. "You're making out like I'm some sort of liar."

"No, not a liar. An addict." Sandy pointed to the terminal. "You use that silly lump of hardware exactly as if it was a drug. Without your daily fix you can't face the real world."

"For gosh sakes, Sandy –"

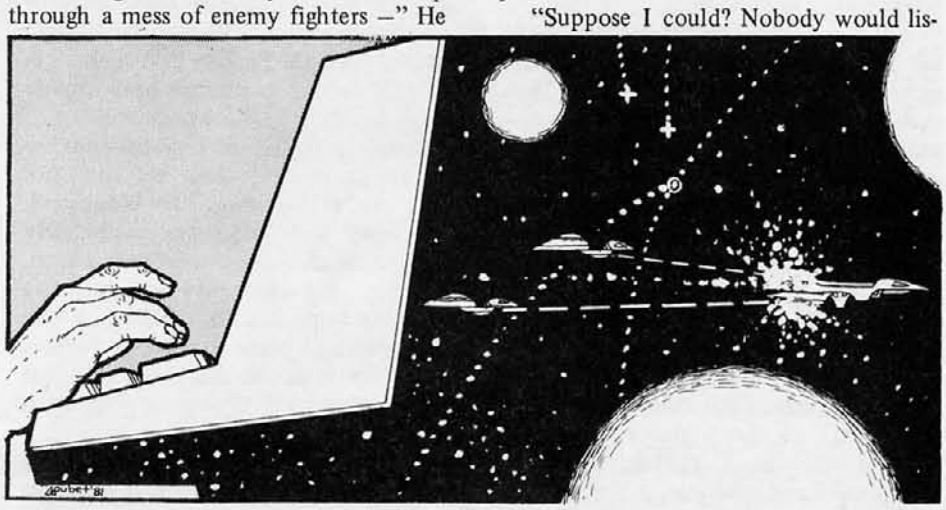
"I like you a lot, John. You're intelligent, and if you put half the time into your studies that you waste on these games there's no telling how far you could go. But this obsession of yours drives me crazy. You're always cutting classes or skipping homework assignments to come here to this – this hiding place of yours. Why, John? What are you afraid of?"

His first impulse was to deflect the question, but he resisted that urge. She was right: this had happened far too often, and the least he could do was to offer her an explanation. If he could find one.

"It's not that I'm afraid of anything, exactly," he began slowly, still marshaling his thoughts. "It's more a matter of – well, look, the world is full of problems these days, problems that don't have any answers. I could beat my head against them forever and not accomplish anything. But with one of these games I can solve a problem, solve it completely. Do you understand?"

"Not really. Life is full of *little* problems, too; ones that aren't any bigger than that computer gives you. You could be solving those instead of wasting your time and energy in this fantasy world of yours."

"Suppose I could? Nobody would lis-



ten to my solutions anyway. We students are about as low on official importance lists as you can get."

"Whereas with the computer you're General John Davis, holding the fates of millions in your hands. Is that it? Is it the sense of power and prestige the games give you?"

"No, I – no – " Flustered, he tried to think. "I told you, it's the sense of accomplishment."

Sandy shook her head sadly. "But you're *not* accomplishing anything, don't you understand? Unless you're dealing with the real world you're just wasting time." She looked down at the floor. "I'm going back to the dorm. Are you coming with me?"

"I . . . well –"

"I didn't think so. So long, John."

"I'm really sorry about the movie. I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Probably."

She left the room, not looking back. John watched her go, then turned back to his keyboard. Glancing over at Parker, who had studiously ignored the confrontation, he said, "What do you think? Am I addicted to this stuff?"

"You're not flunking, are you?" the other countered "This is just a way of relaxing, like handball or something. Everyone needs that."

"But it's more than just recreation," John objected, "It's – oh, skip it."

For a minute he stared at the screen, his thoughts a garbled mess. Could Sandy be right? Was he afraid to tackle the problems of the real world? He had always looked down on people who needed to escape into private fantasies – was he now becoming one himself?

Heck with it. Like everything else in life, there were no easy answers to be found. Maybe some day that would change. In the meantime . . . he had a blockade to run. Hunching forward in his chair, he resumed the game.

It was after three in the morning when he finally solved it. A three-stage slingshot effect using both stars – the large one twice – would get him past the fighters every time. "Got it," he told Parker.

"Really? Let's see." Putting his own game on "hold," Parker watched as John sent another ship along a tortuous path to safety.

ESCAPE FROM LEIX

Scenario for TRIPLANETARY

by Steve Jackson

This scenario for GDW's *Triplanetary* is based on the action in "Fantasy World" – not the actual Leix engagement as much as the gamer's process of solving the tactical problem as it was presented. In its basic form, the scenario is balanced against the Imperial player – once the Leix player can figure out the trick! Once a system for escape has been found, the game can be modified with the variants given at the end, making the problem progressively tougher.

Setup: There are two players. The Imperial player (red counters) sets up first, with two corsairs, three orbital bases, and three dummy counters. All counters are placed upside-down, stationary, on or adjacent to any asteroid hexes.

The Leix player (blue) gets ten packets. Each packet starts the game in orbit around Terra, Luna, Sol, Venus, or Mercury. These starting positions represent various possible spots near the sun Leix B. To represent the heavy planetary defenses, Sol and each inner planet may attack as an orbital base (strength 16) if an Imperial ship comes in range. Sol and the planets may not be attacked.

Substitute counters as necessary, since the game's counter mix does not include (for example) ten packets of any color.

Map changes: Mars does not exist at all. Neither do the asteroids (except as Imperial setup markers). Jupiter and its moons exist and have gravity. Sol and the inner planets exist normally for game purposes, though they do not represent separate bodies.

Movement and Detection: All units begin the game undetected. An Imperial unit is detected when it first moves, or when a packet comes within three hexes of it. A packet is detected when it first burns fuel AFTER leaving orbit, or when it comes within 3 hexes of an Imperial ship or base. Dummies do not detect. Once a ship is detected, it stays detected unless (for a packet) it returns to an inner-system orbit, or (for an Imperial ship) a "re-set" is achieved – see below. Detection occurs at the end of movement, but before combat.

Overloads, Refueling, and Repair: Packets may undergo one overload maneuver, and then require minor maintenance. The same is true of Imperial ships in the basic game. Refueling and minor maintenance take place (for packets) in an inner-system orbit only, and (for Imperial ships) at orbital bases, or after "re-set."

Combat:Imperial corsairs carry one mine each, which may be replaced by rendezvous with an orbital base. Imperial bases are detection stations only, with no combat strength. Packets have a strength of 1 (as printed in the rule book) rather than 2 (as printed on the counters).

Course of the Game: Imperial units begin the game motionless, and may not move until at least one packet is detected. They may not attack, or deliberately move toward, an undetected packet. However, a packet may maneuver to avoid any Imperial unit, detected or not. This will itself cause fuel to be burned, letting the Imperials detect the ship, but can be worthwhile. The game ends when no packets are left on the board.

Reset: If at any time there are no surviving packets on the board outside the five inner-system orbits, the Imperial player may remove all his units from the board, replace any lost dummies, and set his units up again. All units are inverted and motionless, as per the original setup rules. All ships are automatically refueled and given minor maintenance, and corsairs get new mines if needed. All ships are now undetected.

Victory conditions: The Imperial player seeks to destroy as many packets as possible; his own losses are not important. The Leix player seeks to get as many ships off the top of the board as possible. To successfully exit, a ship must have at least 5 fuel units (half its original store) left, and may not be disabled. If seven or more packets successfully escape, the Leix player wins. Six is a tie. Five or fewer is an Imperial win.

Variations: Players will soon discover one or more maneuvers to allow a near-certain Leix victory. At this point, add the following complications, starting with the first and working up.

A. The Empire gets three corsairs.

B. Imperial ships may perform the overload maneuver as often as they like – though they must still watch their fuel use.

C. Use variations A and B together.

D. Leix packets must exit with at least SIX fuel units left.

E. Use variations A and D together.

F. Use variations A, B, and D together.

G. The Empire may trade any or all its three corsairs for two corvettes each.

H. B and G together.

I. B, D, and G together!

And so on . . . Any of the above may be further balanced in favor of the Leix player by letting packets fight at their printed value of 2 – or in favor of the Empire by turning all the packets into unarmed transports.

Leaning back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, John watched the screen, savoring the feel of victory. *This* was what made these games worthwhile; this sense of accomplishment that the real world, with all its tests and grades, consistently denied him. For a moment he thought back to what Sandy had said. But the moment passed. Even though, deep within him, he knew that it was all illusion – that he had the form of triumph without the substance – he was nevertheless content. So what if he had just spent several hours on a project that held not a single iota of value for anyone else in the universe? What mattered was that he himself, John Davis, felt good about what he had done.

Settling himself comfortably, John watched the screen in happy silence.

Three hours later, twenty-two thousand miles above the Earth's surface, Captain Grusulhi watched his computer screen in similar contentment as the blip threaded its way around the two stars and reached the edge of the screen. "Beautiful," the translator on his belt said with clear satisfaction. "And it will work every time?"

At his side Parker nodded. "On its first pass by Leix A the ship brushes a fairly dense level of atmosphere, and a small change in the drag there makes a very large change in the final direction vector. It all really hinges on the fact that the ship is coasting and undetectable for most of its path, and that the course itself is not predictable enough for the fighters to plot a good intercept vector."

"And the only times the fighters have any real chance of intercepting before that they'll be within range of the planetary defenses. Excellent." Grusulhi touched the signaler on his insignia. "Flight deck: prepare a courier ship for a deep space run; ETD four hours. Coding chief: report to Captain's quarters immediately. He smiled at Parker."Looks like we'll finally get those stranded troop carriers back from Leix."

"Yes, sir. What's my next job, Captain?"

Grusulhi handed him a small package. "It's a ground-war game called *Commando Assault.* We need to find a way to take the spaceport on Saiclor with only three hundred men. Think your boy genius has a chance?"

Parker smiled. "Certainly, sir, as long as he thinks it's a game. In fact, I'll bet you he'll have the answer in thirty-six hours."

The captain smiled in return. "I'll take that bet, Parker. I'd say at least forty-eight."

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Featured Review:

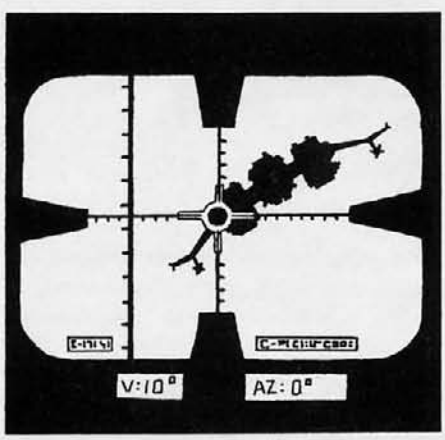
The Warp Factor

by Forrest Johnson

This is the first SF offering from Strategic Simulations, the company which produced the justly-famous *Computer Bismarck*. TWF might be classified as a *Star Trek* program, but it is like no *Star Trek* program you have seen before. In fact, it bears a more-than-suspicious resemblance to *Star Fleet Battles*.

Up to 10 ships can participate in a given combat. There are 12 ship types. Besides Alliance, Klargons, and Remans (read Federation, Klingons and Romulans), you can command an outpost, starbase, Tie-fighter, X-wing (or is it a Viper?), Cylon Raider or the Millenium Falcon. The beautiful illustrations on the reference sheets could have come straight from the various shows and films. There is, however, no mention of any licensing agreement. Presumably, the publisher either has a very good legal staff, or none at all.

At any rate, the game mechanics have a familiar look. Movement is in two dimensions. There are no stars, planets or other sources of gravity to clutter up the screen. Momentum effects are minimal. Each ship has a limited turning rate and ability to accelerate. However, the heaviest dreadnought "can stop on a dime if desired." (The idea of "stopping" in space is worth a chuckle.)



Each ship has six defensive screens, arranged clockwise. To knock down other ships' screens, there are phasers, photon torpedoes, disruptors, drones and plasma torpedoes. When the enemy's shields collapse, you can send over a boarding party via transporter. Only Romulans (oops, I mean "Remans") have cloaking devices, but anyone can use ECM to foul up the enemy's sensors.

Each player secretly allocates energy between these functions, then plots movement. The movement routine allows up to 16 separate changes of course. Weapons can fire at any point during movement, or they can be set to fire at a range, or at "last instant." There is a "set display" routine which allows 11 magnifications of the battle zone, to help you plan strategy.

A considerable range of tactics are possible. The rules mention "the J-curve," "the Fly-by," "Carouselling" and "Threading the Needle." All are attempts to bring the maximum number of guns to bear at the most opportune moment. Each is a legitimate tactic, and some of them are used by computer-controlled ships in the solo game.

A good bit of memory is apparently devoted to ship strategy. But, alas, a machine makes an unimaginative opponent. A given ship uses a given tactic regardless what it is fighting. A "Klargon" cruiser continues to J-curve at 10 megaklicks a turn, even though its target is 100+ MK away and retreating.

Human opponents are better. But the computer does have one advantage – it doesn't make mistakes. If a human presses the wrong key, that's that; there is not enough error trapping. To make things worse, the computer sometimes requires a carriage return after an order, and sometimes does not. A player can easily become confused and debounce himself past an important subroutine. *(Sorry! You don't get to shoot this turn!)*

The situation is not improved by the number of errors on the reference sheets. The computer, as Darth Vader, knows there are no type 2 drones on the Tie-fighter. A human player is left to discover this fact for himself, probably at an embarrassing moment.

At the end of each game, the computer assesses victory. Each ship has a point value ranging from 1 for a fighter to 21 for a starbase. The larger force has a big disadvantage. If you're much more powerful than your enemy, you literally can't "win," even if you blow him away without taking a hit yourself. Luke Skywalker can take on nine dreadnoughts if he chooses; he is certain to be destroyed, but even more certain to win a splendid victory.

Overall, play balance is no better than in *Star Fleet Battles*. Whoever decided, for example, that three Cylon Raiders are equal to a Federation cruiser should try to play it once or twice. Players will have to construct their scenarios without relying on the given point values.

Unfortunately, the creator of *Computer Bismarck* is not on the credits. This game is SLOW. In using Applesoft Basic, and every possible programming shortcut, the designer put his own convenience ahead of the user's. For example, his use of an off-the-shelf character generator means that ships can be displayed in only four positions. (Your course is 45 degrees, but it looks like 90.) The graphics are unexciting. There is no sound and no color. The tactical richness of this game is almost its sole attractive feature.

THE WARP FACTOR should have been named *Computer Star Fleet Battles*. Judging from the time the machine takes to calculate damage, I suspect the SFB damage tables were simply copied wholesale into memory. One can only wish the programmer had taken a few more liberties with his text.

Still, THE WARP FACTOR is a challenging game. Our machine was kept pretty busy by staffers who wanted to know, for example, how Captain Kirk would do against a swarm of Tie-fighters. It is slow, but it *can* keep your attention. And it is a good buy for the *Star Fleet Battles* addict who can't find an opponent.

THE WARP FACTOR (Strategic Simulations); $39.95. A 48K Applesoft disk by Paul Murray and Bruce D. Clayton. Box includes 12-page rulebook, 4 reference sheets, floppy disk. One or two players; playing time 1-3 hours. Published 1980.

STRATEGY

Winning at THE WARP FACTOR requires more than a little familiarity with the program and the ships involved. Basically, you must maneuver your ship so that your own weapons will bear on your foes' weakest shields – while insuring that your own ship passes through few fields of fire. If you must accept fire, you want it to fall on your strong shields. If you suspect a weak shield will be fired on, you must reinforce it. All well and good . . . the problem is that shields have different values, your best weapons will usually have only a limited field of fire, and you *never* have enough power available. The reader is left to develop his own favorite tricks, but these few hints will speed your learning:

(1) Shield support is better than it looks. The rulebook undervalues shield support. Unless you're *positive* you know which specific shield the enemy will hit, general support is better than reinforcement.

(2) If you have drones, use one a turn, every turn, starting as soon as the foe is within range. There is no point-bonus for saving your drones, and the sooner you kill the enemy, the sooner he quits firing on you. Note that drones do NOT retain the velocity of the parent ship – this game has almost no momentum effects.

(3) Faced with multiple enemies, hit one at a time. Don't spread your fire unless you *know* that you have more than enough power to demolish a single foe. A ship which can absorb 6-point hits indefinitely may be crippled or smashed by a single 9-point blow.

(4) Practice makes perfect. Once you've run the program once or twice and looked at the pretty lights, I recommend some serious practice before you play a live foe – or even the computer – for "blood." It's very frustrating to be two hours into a tense game, fighting for your life, and then realize you don't know exactly how your ship will respond to the command you want to give. My recommendation is:

Scenario Zero: Naval Maneuvers. Before a commander takes a new ship out, he must put her through her paces in "naval maneuvers" against a friendly starbase. His weapons have been replaced by training simulators. The starbase will sit there as he maneuvers and fires at it; his bridge computer will let him know what he would have done to the starbase in a real attack. However, the starbase does not return fire; thus, the captain will be able to test his maneuvers, firing orders, and accuracy at his leisure.

To set up this scenario, punch up a two-human game. Take a single ship of your choice, opposing a starbase. Enter your ship commands normally; when the starbase's turn comes, enter "MS / 0 / 16" to abort its turn without action. Thus, you'll have ample opportunity to test your weapons for accuracy and damage at various distances, and to find out exactly what the effective field of fire is for each of your weapons. (Warning: the reference sheets are not 100% accurate.) You can also experiment with the precise effects of some commands. Try a "fire at range 100" command at range 20, for instance. You can also punch up various levels of ECM for the Starbase, to see how your hit chances are affected by ECM with other factors remaining stable.

When you've put your ship through a couple of hours of maneuvers, you'll be ready for serious play against the computer or a live opponent. Not only will you be less likely to hit a key at the wrong time (aborting a move and blowing the turn) – you'll know just what your ship can do, and you'll give your orders quickly and efficiently, freeing yourself for tactical intricacy. Good hunting.

– *Steve Jackson*

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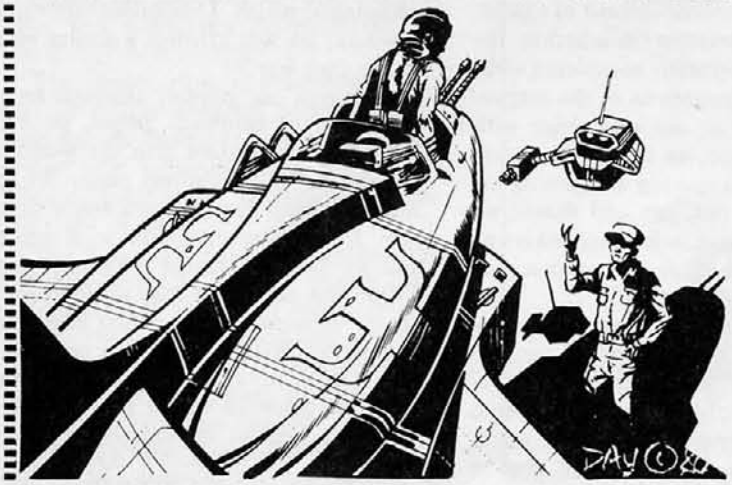

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Company Report:

Strategic Simulations

We were a couple of wargamers who had tired of waiting for the large game companies to invest in computer game design. Although the home computer market was small, surveys we conducted seemed to show that there were enough gamers with computers to justify starting SSI.

Early on, we realized we had to study each home computer to determine which, if any, was suitable for strategy games. Due to the small number of computer owners in general, we were forced to consider only the PET, TRS-80 and Apple. We had to answer three questions about each machine. First, is it technically possible to produce a complex wargame on the computer? Second, are there enough owners of the system who would consider purchasing our products? Third, how would we reach potential customers with our products? Contrary to the then-current beliefs of major wargame companies, we came to the conclusion that only the Apple offered all of the technical and marketing features which we required. The Apple was the only computer which offered technical advantages (hi-res color graphics, sound, and automatic chaining from one program to another), a large base of 48K disk owners, and a network of retail stores. (Radio Shack stores refused to carry anything but Radio Shack products, while small computer stores generally preferred Apple software since they did not sell TRS-80s.) Why 48K disk products only? We did not want to do a simple game with only 16K. Our experience quickly revealed that a state-of-the-art wargame requires at least 50-100K, and only Apple's chaining gave us this.

You may be wondering why I have spent so much time talking about computers. SSI is a computer game company. The selection of which computer to use was the most important decision we had to make. We would like to produce complex, high-quality games which could be used on any computer, but it is simply impractical. As an experiment, we did produce a TRS-80 version of *Computer Bismarck*, but we do not plan anything further in that line. It is possible that we will begin converting some of our games to the Atari computer in the next year, but only if Atari sales pick up considerably.

All of us are anxiously awaiting the next breakthrough in home computers, you know, 128K RAM – built in disk drive – built in color monitor all for $1000 to $1500. However, we don't expect this for another 1-3 years. In the meanwhile, we have developed our own disk operating system for the Apple. It will save about 6K of memory, and speed play considerably. The new DOS will be integral to our next releases, *Torpedo Fire* and thereafter.

Why all the commotion about computers? The answer involves what everyone believes a computer can do for a wargame. A computer can allow limited intelligence. Also, it can allow simultaneous movement, while doing all of the necessary bookkeeping. It can also keep the players somewhat in the dark as to the combat resolution system, taking the edge away from the mathematician wargamer (and eliminating the old 199-100 equals 1-1 syndrome). It can also keep track of step reduction and other paperwork. Possibly most importantly, the computer can provide an opponent when one finds a shortage of human players. These are the key abilities of the computer, that is if it's an IBM 3033, and that is the problem. Most, if not all, home computers cannot handle all of the above.

When we begin development of a game, our first consideration is whether the game can be successfully completed within the memory limitations of the computer. Secondly, after our experience with *Computer Ambush*, we now ask whether the computer can quickly execute its job as referee, or if not, can and should we simplify the game in order to speed it up? There is always a trade-off between realism and speed of execution.

To date, most of our games have featured limited intelligence, blind simultaneous movement, and a computer opponent. Unfortunately, we have discovered that the computer suffers from two major weaknesses. The display cannot give as much information at a glance as a board game is able to do. Also, the process of moving a unit around on a computer screen is much more laborious than moving one on a board. Although we have tried to minimize these problems with commands which allow the player to receive information, and which provide easy movement of units, we have not eliminated the problem. It is possible that with the use of light pens, we could simplify the movement system (just point at the unit on the screen and then point at the location you wish it to move to), but it is unlikely that enough computer owners will spend $200 for the hardware needed. These two problems will undoubtedly continue to be the biggest thorns in the side of strategy computer gaming.

Some of our latest games have attempted to minimize the above mentioned problems. *Operation Apocalypse* uses a straightforward movement system which allows players to move units on the computer almost as easily as they would on a board. With stacking of units prohibited, the players can gain a lot, if not total, information from a glance at the display. The next step is to use the same game system and to allow stacking. *Torpedo Fire* is visually oriented, with its 3D view from the sub's periscope and multiple magnification maps. Unfortunately, important statistics such as damage received and firepower strength cannot be shown on the map, but must be looked up separately.

Sometime this summer we will release a Napoleonic campaign game which will feature the inability of the army commanders to instantly communicate with units outside of their area of command, as well as the unpredictability of subordinate commanders who are separated from the main army. With limited intelligence, not only tactically, but also strategically, this game will attempt to take advantage of all of the computer's advantages which I discussed above. If it works, we will attempt a similar game on the Civil War.

Although our primary interests are in the realm of historical games, we have just begun to venture into the world of science fiction and fantasy games. We felt that *The Warp Factor* was a major deviation from other computer sci-fi games, and we hope to design a fantasy game within the next year that will be significantly different from current computer adventures. With our eventual goal being the release of 12 new products every year, we hope to create a product line that will interest all computer gamers.

– Joel Billings

Computers to Go

by Aaron Allston

It's not very conspicuous, this little shop, with windows facing a submarine-sandwich joint to one side and a florist across the street, all a stone's throw from the University of Texas at Austin campus. But Computers to Go may well represent an important development in the personal computer market.

The main order of business here is not selling computers, but selling computer time. For $1/ten minutes, $2.50/half-hour, or $4.50/hour, anyone can walk in to play *Rescue at Rigel*, update his business records, or enter a dissertation and print it out on the shop's Diablo printer. The business also rents and leases computer systems and supplemental hardware for use outside the shop, and customers can rent-to-buy or lease-to-buy.

"The original philosophy," says Casey Carter, founder/manager of Computers to Go, "was to buy three computers and rent 'em to people. Then the money crunch hit." He chose only one computer – an Apple II system – and gradually built up from there. "We opened May of last year."

"We started to add accessories – software, hardware. As time has gone on, more and more things have happened." The little shop with appropriately polyhedral walls now has nine computers operating on the premises, plus the systems and accessories currently out on rental or lease contracts.

The conversation is interrupted as a pair of college students enters to negotiate for the Diablo for a month. Carter, a man with a lazy grin and a Ph. D. in Science Education, quickly concludes terms for its rental.

The business is expanding. Within the first few weeks of April, a branch business will open in a small shopping mall just up the street, with a mainstay of several Ataris, which will probably rent out at $2.50/hour. The main shop does not have a predominant system – Apples, Ataris, PMC-80s, and Intertec Data System Superbrains are pretty evenly scattered about. The branch business will attempt to provide some competition to the area's pinball/electronic game arcades.

"As far as I know," Carter declares of Computers to Go, "it's the first anywhere, We've had people call in from out of state who've heard of us." And what are the chances of others starting up similar businesses?

"I don't think very many people would want to," he laughs. "First of all, ten years of experience is a nice sounding board. Then, there are the long days." The business is open 13 hours a day, 6 days a week, which he says is something of a heresy in the industry. The branch business will have even later working hours.

A delivery man begins bringing in terminals for use with the University computer systems, piling box after box in a growing wall, blocking access to a line of computers. New purchases such as these, plus rising costs in hardware – such as an across-the-board rise in Apple products as of the first of the year – and purchases for the new branch minimize the amount of advertising Carter can afford, but some promotions are apparent. Giveaway "calendars" with each day of the month bearing a money-off coupon are stacked on a table. An upcoming promotion involves frisbees, which are probably not the sort of floppy disks most customers are used to.

Computers to Go is a novelty among the businesses which surround the UT campus. Perhaps the concept will catch on, but it will take time to see. In the meantime, the shop stands cheerily open, with walls cluttered with packages of sale-or-rent software, programming manuals, computer-art and T-shirts, the floor littered with a mound of boxed Atari software and occasional pieces of hardware, ready for the customer not yet willing to shell out thousands of dollars for a personal system.

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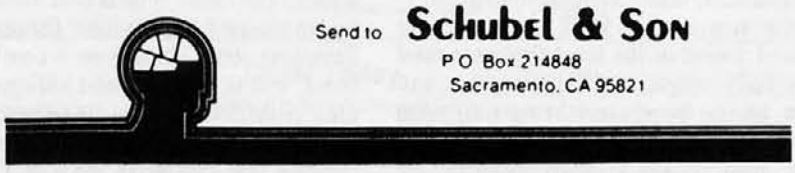

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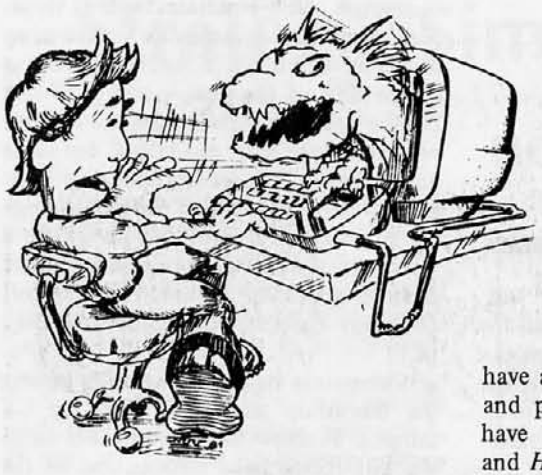


Computer Gaming Update

by Bruce Webster

It's been over a year and a half now since my first column on computers and gaming. During that time I have written nearly a dozen articles, played many of the top games on the market, had many discussions (either face-to-face or through letters), and generally done a lot of thinking on the subject. The field has changed a lot during that period as well. I think it would be fair to say that close to 90% of the computer game software now on the market (ignoring the "101 BASIC Games" genre) wasn't available back in mid-1979. A few companies have cornered large chunks of the market, while new companies, based around one or two pieces of software, are springing up all the time. Much has changed in a year and a half, and the *rate* of change shows no signs of slacking off.

The purpose of this column is to stop and take a look at some areas in the field of computer gaming: where it is now, and where it might go in the future. At the same time, I'm going to throw in my own opinions about some of the games, companies, and trends in the market.

Recent Developments

The last few years has seen a veritable flood of gaming software for home computers. At the same time, the level of sophistication has increased dramatically. In the summer of 1979, most of the games I found in the local Computerland were fairly simple arcade-type games, and most of the computers being sold were cassette-based systems with 16K of RAM. Now most of the systems going out of that same store are 32 or 48K systems with at least one floppy disk drive, and most of the games hanging on their walls have also gone up in size, complexity . . . and price. *Phazor Zap* and *Space Maze* have given way to *Computer Bismarck* and *Hellfire Warrior*, cassettes have been replaced by diskettes, and average prices have gone from around $12 up to $30, with many games falling in the $40-$60 bracket. In short, computer games are becoming big business, and some distinct categories have developed.

Perhaps the most popular class of computer game currently out on the market is the role-playing game. These include such titles as Automated Simulations' *Dunjonquest* and *Starquest* series, the various versions of *Adventure* (Microsoft, Scott Adams, et al), Edu-Ware's *Space/Space II*, and a host of others. I see two basic reasons for their popularity. First are the same reasons that *Traveller, Dungeons & Dragons,* and other role-playing games are popular – and I will leave it to the reader to decide just what those reasons are (thus neatly avoiding having to perform *that* analysis). Second, they give the player an always-ready gamemaster who is available at any hour of the night or day to run a game for his sole benefit.

Curiously enough, two sub-classes have developed among these games. One is centered around the original *Adventure* game from MIT. This type usually is dialog-centered, and is based around picking up everything in sight in order to solve problems later or to help you get out of the twisty little passages that all look the same. Graphics and combat options are scarce. The other type is best exemplified by Automated Simulations' *Dunjonquest/Starquest* series. This type is combat-centered, and is based around killing (or running from) every living thing you run into, avoiding traps, and picking up what treasure you can along the way. Graphics are used heavily, and commands are quite limited and deal mostly with combat. Aficionados of each type tend to put down the other. I personally enjoy both, and would like to see the two styles merged.

Video

Video games in arcades have become more sophisticated, and so have the arcade-type games for home computers. These tend to be imitations of the games available in the arcades – *Space Invaders* and the like – though Atari's *Star Raiders* is a wonderful exception. And mention of Atari brings up another point: the graphics capabilities of most home computers can't match those of arcade units (Atari is the exception again), so the games usually aren't quite as nice. However, if you're an arcade game fan (and I must confess to spending a few quarters now and then in the local mall), these home computer versions can quickly pay for themselves – especially if you charge your friends as well.

A number of simulation games have shown up on the market, though not as many as I would like. Edu-Ware, Inc., has produced the most innovative of those that I've seen, especially *Terrorist* (which could be called a role-playing game, except it's nothing like the ones mentioned above). Indeed, Edu-Ware has produced *all* that I've seen, with the exception of Muse Software's *Three Mile Island* (another excellent game). This is definitely an area that could use more development.

There are also a number of "conquer/save the universe" games, not to mention the innumerable versions of *Star Trek* (all disguised to avoid problems with Gene Roddenberry and each other). I have a personal weakness for these types of games (though I have yet to see a *Star Trek* game I like), and my all-time favorite computer game – Tom Cleaver's *Galactic Empires* (not to be confused with Douglas Carston's *Galactic Empire*) – falls into this category (see my review in TSG 31).

Along the same line are the many play-by-mail games that are completely moderated by a gamemaster with the help of a computer. Most of these are based on a space exploration/conquest theme, e.g., *Universe II, Warp Force One,* and the grand-daddy of them all, *Starweb*. And not only are most of these computer-based, but now *Starweb* moves can be sent in via a nation-wide timesharing network known as The Source, and rumor has it that *Empyrean Challenge* will soon be doing the same.

Ironically, there are very few true "computer wargames." Strategic Simulations, Inc., has made the biggest and best effort in this area; unfortunately, their games tend to cost an arm and a leg. Ava-

Apple II

sensational software

creative computing software

Air Traffic Controller

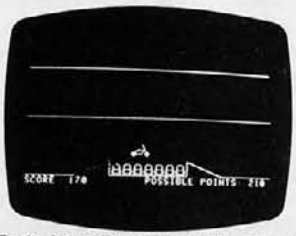
$11.95
Requires 16K
Cassette CS-4008

Apple II or Apple II Plus

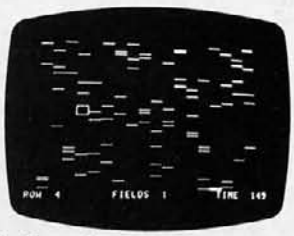
This fast-moving, real time program puts you in the chair of an air traffic controller. You control 27 prop planes and jets as they land, take off and fly over your air space. You give orders to change altitude, turn, maintain a holding pattern, approach and land at two airports. Written by an air traffic controller, this realistic machine language simulation includes navigational beacons and requires planes to take off and land into the wind. With its continuously variable skill level, you won't easily tire of this absorbing and instructive simulation.

Action Games

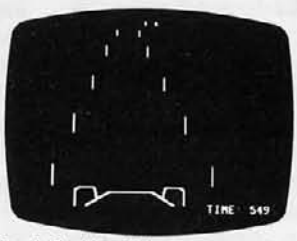
Cassette CS-4017 $11.95 3 Games



Cycle Jump. Try to jump over rows of cars, buses and trucks.



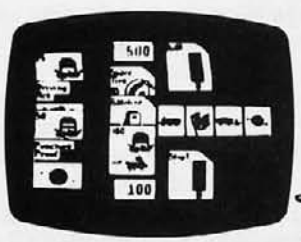
Mine Rover. Use your rover to cross a mine field with moving mines.



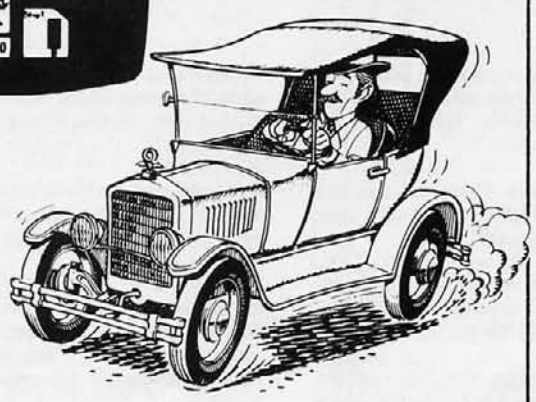
Road Machine. Drive over a curving, mountain road as fast as possible. Eight skill levels.

Milestones

Cassette CS-4015 $11.95 Requires 48K Applesoft or Apple II Plus

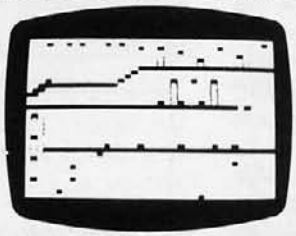


The object of Milestones is to complete a 700-mile auto trip before your opponent, the computer. You must deal with hazards of the roads: stop lights, flat tires, speed limits, accidents and gas shortages. Spectacular high-resolution color graphics.



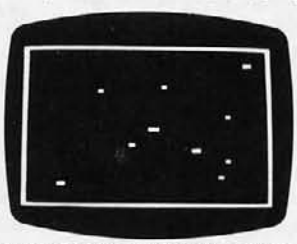
Bumping Games

Cassette CS-4020 $11.95 3 Programs



Obstacle Course. This multi-level course includes hurdles, ladders, tires and penalty areas. Different every time.

Hustle. The score keeps building but the escape routes dwindle. Can you reach the blocks before they disappear?



Bumper Blocks. An absorbing game of evasion and collision. Five skill levels.

Action & Bumping Games

Disk CS-4516, $24.95
Requires 32K Applesoft or Apple II Plus
This disk contains all six games from cassettes CS-4017 and CS-4020.

Milestones

Disk CS-4515, $19.95
Requires 48K Apple II or Apple II Plus
In addition to the game itself, this disk contains the complete playing instructions.

Advanced Air Traffic Controller

Disk CS-4517, $19.95
Requires 16K Apple or Apple II Plus

This price is an advanced version of Air Traffic Controller (Cassette CS-4008) offering additional features and challenge.

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lon Hill has put out some games at the other end of the financial spectrum, but, as the saying goes, you get what you pay for – not much. The lack of development here could be explained by the observation that conventional wargamers aren't as attracted to computers as SF/fantasy gamers. The problem is, I don't know if that's really true, and it doesn't explain why so few SF/fantasy wargames for computers have been developed. The "microgame" format has been well developed for board games – why not for computer games?

Areas for Exploration

While the variety of computer games has been steadily increasing, there are some areas that have not yet been developed, or at least not very well. In some cases this lack of development is understandable, but in others it is very curious.

I am most amazed by the lack of software for gamemasters of role-playing games. It is incredible that, given the growing national popularity of D&D and other such games, no one has come up with marketable software to (1) design dungeons (countries, worlds, solar systems, etc.), (2) perform other random creations and initializations that can take up so much of a gamemaster's time, and (3) actually aid the gamemaster while he/she is moderating a session (rolling dice, determining combat factors, generating random encounters). I mentioned this concept in my very first column, and I've been threatening to do an entire column on the subject ever since. Maybe I'd better follow through. Or perhaps I'll just write the software myself.

Along the same lines, I've seen little mention of programs that are designed to either aid players with a given boardgame or to provide a player with an opponent for said game. There has been occasional mention of game-aid programs in SPI publications, and Adrian Pett down in Australia has written and published a game-aid program for SPI's *After The Holocaust*, but that's all I've seen along those lines. As for opponent programs, the only mention I've run across has been in letters I've received from TSG readers, half of whom seem to be working on programs to play *Ogre*.

There is yet another wide-open field: multi-player games. There are a large number of possibilities here: several people sitting around one computer; two (or more) computers hooked directly up to each other; two (or more) computers communicating via modems; do-it-yourself play-by-phone or play-by-mail games; and so on. *Galactic Empires* is the best example of the first possibility that I know of, handling one to twenty players. None of the other ideas have been commercially developed, as far as I know. Why don't some of the numerous software entrepreneurs work on these types of games, rather than turning out the 37th version of *Adventure* or *Star Trek*?

The Future

The problems I see facing the gaming software market in the future are largely the same as I see facing the entire personal computing software market. Game programs will continue to be expensive, due largely to over-anxious distributors and programmers who hope to make a quick killing before software pirates distribute their programs free of charge. Software piracy will continue to flourish, aided by new and better copying programs and fueled by rising software prices. If you seem to see a vicious spiral there, welcome to the club. My personal opinion is that we will see no solution to these problems until someone introduces the software equivalent of microgames, i.e., well-designed but inexpensive games. If that approach is combined with the use of components (counters, maps, etc.) that are not easily copied, we could see the same sort of revolution in computer gaming as occurred in boardgaming when *Ogre* hit the market.

The continuing sophistication of personal computers will have an impact on the games being written. As mentioned above, the Atari 400/800 has far and away the best graphics of any personal computer I've seen and will set a new standard for the industry. As modems become more popular, local and national networks will provide new types of game playing experiences. More games will be written in languages other than Basic, especially now that Apple is licensing a specially modified UCSD Pascal operating system that allows Pascal programs to be booted up and run on 48K Basic systems. Inertia and a tight economy will probably delay any really significant hardware advances, but 1985 should probably see a large number of 16-bit (and maybe 32-bit) personal computers on the market, with increased processor speed and memory expandable to 1 MB (1000K) and up.

If I had to reduce my comments on the current state of computer gaming to one phrase, it would be *caveat emptor* – "let the buyer beware." There is a lot of half-finished software out on the market, nestled among the better-written stuff, and both types are very expensive. Frankly, my advice to those of you who own your own computers and who want to play well-written games on them is to learn to program well and write most of them yourselves, buying only the ones that you really want to. If you don't feel you can program well, or if you don't have the time, then read the reviews, ask around, try to actually play the game before buying it – and be prepared to spend a lot of money.

Next: Play-by-phone update

TRS-80 Briefing

A regular reviewer, Jon Mishcon, was asked a while ago to tell the editor about the various models of TRS-80 available. We thought his answer was worth publishing.

In re the TRS models. There are now five major models of the TRS-80. Generally their software is not interchangeable.

Model I Level I is a 4K beginner's machine. Not many around anymore, and not much software available. Any of its programs can*not* be used on any other TRS-80 without a lot of modification.

Model I Level II has just been taken off the market (there is a company in California that is producing the PMC computer which uses the EXACT same ROM and RAM so the generic line will continue) although Radio Shack is going to continue to produce peripherals and software for this machine. It has sold well over 250,000 and is the single most popular computer EVER sold. Model I Level II refers to the Read Only Memory arrangement. This model TRS-80 may have between 16 to 48K and all sorts of devices added on. It was taken off the market only because it was thought too expensive to modify it to comply with the new FCC regulations.

Model II is a fairly expensive business-oriented machine. Its software is *not* compatible with any other TRS-80 but there is little game software for it.

Model III is the "new Model I Level II." It has all the latest improvements and a couple of doodads. The vast majority of Model I Level II software will work on the Model III. Naturally Radio Shack can't tell owners which will and which won't.

Color Model TRS-80 is the latest TRS and is almost solely designed to challenge APPLE in the game market. The Color TRS is completely incompatible with any other TRS-80. Personally I believe it will fail horribly.

Henceforth, a reference to "TRS-80" on these pages means the Model I Level II or Model III, unless otherwise specified.

DESIGNER'S NOTES

akalabeth

by Lord British

Many games on the market have one of two major flaws. Some have minimal graphics. And those which have decent graphics often run so slo-o-o-o-w that the game value gets lost in the lag time between moves. When I created *Akalabeth* (and now *Ultima*), these were the two main problems I had to address.

Before *Akalabeth*, fantasy computer graphics were fairly primitive. In fact, my inspiration for *Akalabeth* was a game called *Escape*, which had low resolution graphics. My objective was to create a game which would show monsters and dungeon corridors in perfect perspective.

I approached the problem from three angles: the artist's approach (thanks, Mom!), the calculus approach (thanks, Dad!) and the trigonometric approach (thanks, Me!). Fortunately, all the paths led me to a very simple solution. The implementation can get a bit complicated, but an explanation in layman's language appears below.

Having cleared this hurdle, I started to design the "game." Fantasy role-playing games generally have elaborate combat systems, with lots of modifiers and look-up tables. A similar approach often crops up in computer games, but the result is so slow that a real-time game is all but impossible.

Though I am a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism, with many a bloodless combat behind me, I thought a simpler approach was necessary. In *Akalabeth*, all the complexities of hand-to-hand combat are covered by a few, simple algorithms. Purists will not be happy that, for example, I use "sword" to represent everything from a mighty hand-and-a-halfer to a springy little epee. But simplifications were unavoidable, given the game speed I hoped to achieve.

Many games which do have nice graphics aren't worth playing because the programmer concentrated on the graphics and didn't allow enough variety. Wary of this pitfall, I stocked my dungeons with thieves who stole your weapons, gremlins who ate up your food, traps that dropped you to a lower level, and mimics which disguised themselves as chests. An adventurer's life may be short, but it is certain to be exciting.

Unfortunately, *Akalabeth* was not perfect (sigh!). Because I did not have a disk drive (everyone has to start at the bottom), I could not include a routine for saving the game. Even when I got a disk drive, there was no memory left to allow a game storing routine.

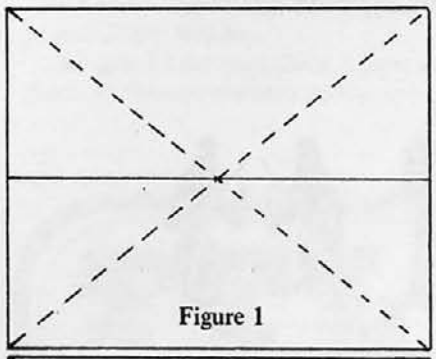
Having finished *Akalabeth* (and having learned much from my mistakes), I set out to design the most complete fantasy role-playing game yet written for the computer. All but a few of my most far-fetched goals were reached with *Ultima*.

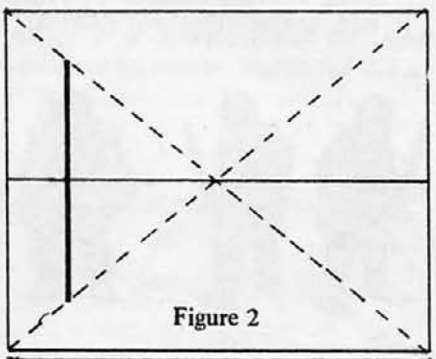
Ultima is *Akalabeth* and more. Players have a choice of four races and four professions. Magic has been expanded. Technology has been introduced. A character can eventually buy a time machine or space shuttle, if he survives long enough.

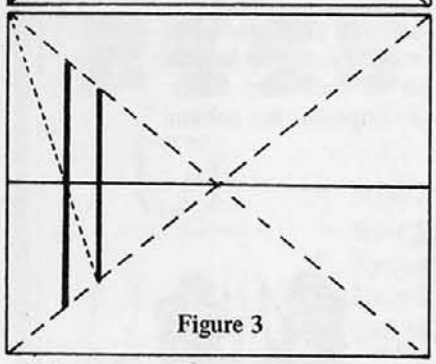
Ultima is written in Basic and machine language. (*Akalabeth* was primarily Basic.) Basic makes string manipulation easy and is good enough for the text portions of the program. Machine code, of course, runs much faster than Basic and *must* be used for things like complete hi-res screen updates. By skillfully mixing the languages, a programmer can combine his own convenience with the players'.

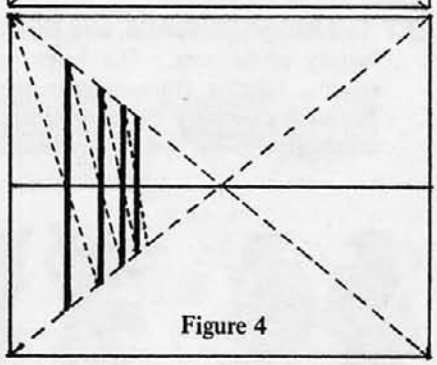
Throughout my efforts, I have emphasized realism, trying to give the players a character's-eye-view of my fantasy worlds. I use one-stroke orders to speed input. I have gone to great lengths to make the graphics as clean and realistic as possible. With this kind of help, it becomes very easy for gamers to make the transition from reality to fantasy.

3-D Graphics









One way to draw a dungeon corridor is to use the same technique that an artist uses to draw a row of telephone poles beside a country road. First, use diagonal lines to connect the corners of your screen and draw the horizon through the center (Figure 1).

Place the first pole as shown in Figure 2. I find this looks best at a place a third or a fourth of the distance from the edge to the center.

Next, draw a line from the upper left hand corner of the screen, and through the point where the first telephone pole intersects the horizon. The base of the second pole belongs where the line touches the lower diagonal, as in Figure 3. To establish the base of the third pole, draw a line from the top of the first pole, through the point where the second pole intersects the horizon. You can continue this process as often as necessary, placing the fourth pole, the fifth, and so on (Figure 4).

For further information, feel free to contact me care of this magazine.

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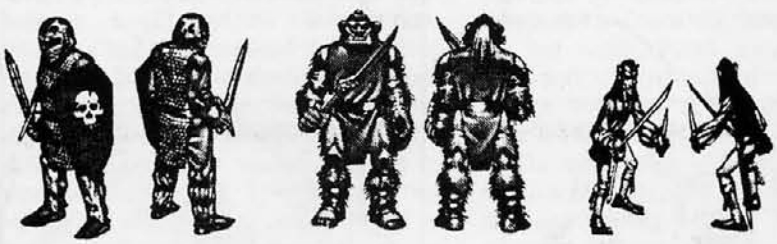

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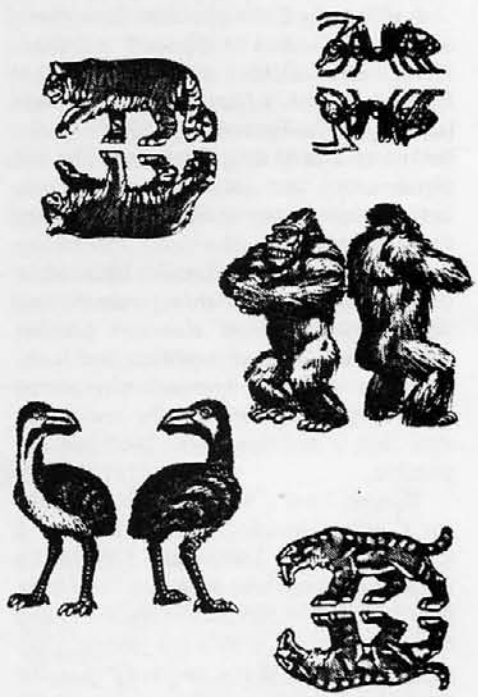
SET 3: HALF-ORCS, REPTILE MEN, and KOBOLDS. Another set of humanoid foes. The half-orcs combine the worst features of man and orc, and carry a variety of jagged weapons. The reptile men are massive, scaled humanoids who fight with fang and claw as well as swords. The kobolds are stocky, blue-skinned little fiends, suitable for mass attacks (especially from behind . . .)

Now your fantasy battles can have all the detail and excitement of miniatures . . . without the cost, weight, and painting hassle of metal figures. Each set includes 40 different figures (45 in the ANIMALS set) – at a suggested retail price of only $3. Four sets are available now, and more are on the way.



SET 4: ANIMALS. 45 different beasties in three different sizes . . . ranging from pets and familiars through gorillas, sabertooth tigers, and giant birds. Also included are a variety of wolves, giant reptiles and insects, and other assorted menaces.

Coming soon: Monsters . . . undead . . . giants . . . and some surprises . . .

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THE Beep-Boop Menace

Dear Sir: I have what is probably a fairly common problem. I am addicted to an arcade video game called *Battlezone*.

It all began innocently when some friends convinced me to 'try it.' I was mildly entertained and afterward thought nothing of it. Weeks later, a lonely evening found me in the arcade's neighborhood and I went in to pass the time. Before I knew what ordeal I had begun, I was destroying enemy tanks, missiles and saucers with such accuracy that I made the day's top 10 scores and got to put my initials on the screen.

Since then, I have spent hundreds of quarters maintaining my habit, and my only goal for the day is to improve my personal best and stay atop the standings.

I have started lying about what I do with my time, and I must wear gloves to hide the tell-tale blisters on my hands.

I think people should know that *Battlezone*, because it is three-dimensional, is much more dangerous than the "recreational" games like *Missile Command, Star Castle,* or *Space Invaders*.

Today in my car I had a flashback. To avoid laser fire, I reversed through oncoming traffic and maneuvered to blast them off the road. It was only when my trigger thumb pressed and nothing happened that I snapped out of it and found myself backed up on a grassy knoll. I swore then and there never to play again. But I've tried to stop before and I always go back. What am I to do?

– 542,000 and Counting

Dear Sir or Madam:

I don't know what any of us is going to do. You are one of the countless American citizens who have fallen prey to the greatest threat ever to confront this nation.

For the first time in our history, this country's corporate establishment is working hand-in-hand with the International Communist Conspiracy. Their goal is nothing less than complete control of the minds of this generation of American youth. And they are winning.

Where are you now when we need you, Ross Perot? Probably playing *Space Invaders*.

The conspirators had a run at us a couple of decades ago with pinball machines. They were within a trice of gaining the ultimate triumph when a ball-bearing shortage in Russia pulled us back from the brink.

I personally witnessed how close they came. I had a roommate at that time. I would say to him, "Roommate, tonight we have our choice of going to the Playgirls of the Southwest Conference Naked Mayonnaise Wrestling finals, watching the Texas Longhorns play a team of fire-breathing, winged gargoyles from the bowels of hell for the future of the universe, or talking with representatives of the two major political parties, both of which wish to run us for president. What do you think?"

"Let's go play some pinball," he would say.

Today, it is worse. I have a friend, a professional man of impeccable credentials and of high standing in the community. He tells his wife that he will be late coming home because he has a meeting with organized-crime czars, a heroin-shooting party and then the continuation of a flaming affair with his secretary.

"I could handle that," his wife says, "but I know that he is really sneaking out to play *Space Invaders*."

Oh yes, I have seen them. I have seen them in the convenience stores and the theater lobbies and the arcades, their cheeks hollow, their frames gaunt, their eyes glazed and listless, lining up to plug that last quarter into *Asteroids*.

We have produced a generation that cannot read. Soon, I fear, we will have one which cannot speak; a whole generation of Americans who, when they open their mouths, will come forth only with "Beep boop ding ding boop boop beep."

I'll tell you, "542,000 and Counting," I can see only one way out of it. Retaliate in kind. Retaliate with force so swift and devastating as to destroy their minds before they can do it to ours. Yes, you know what I am talking about.

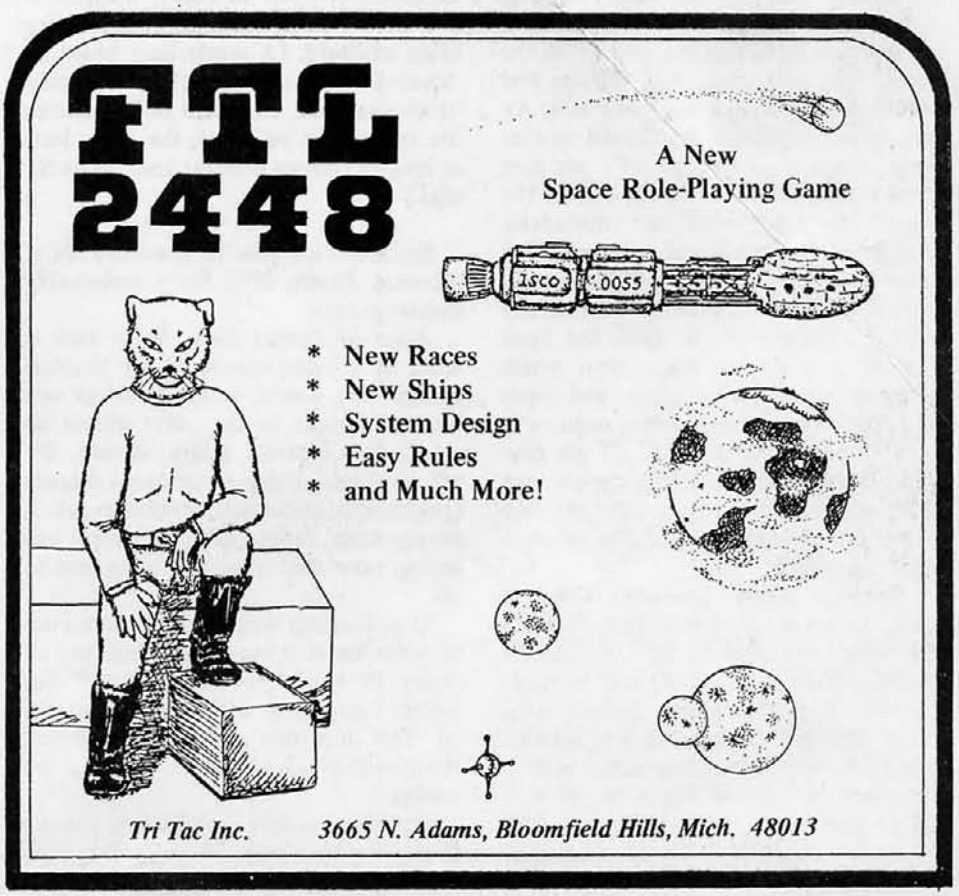
I am talking here about dropping video cassettes, produced by NBC and ABC respectively, of *Real Russians* and *That's the Incredible Ukraine* across the length and breadth of you know where.

I know it's inhumane. I know that it's despicable, barbaric torture. But it's us against them and parlous times demand stern measures.

To the battlements, I say. Or, in your language, beep ding ding boop boop beep!

– Mike Kelley

Kelley is a columnist for The Austin American-Statesman. Reprinted by permission.



Magic Contest Results

This was another popular contest; we got better than fifty entries, many of them very good. Therefore, we've printed as many as space allowed. Entries have been subjected to a minimum of editing, and have been left in the original system(s) for which they were written. GMs or characters wishing to modify spells to other systems should have little difficulty.

The winner was Draper Kauffman, of St. Louis. He sent three items, all ingenious and useful.

The Spell Crystal: Magic item. A prismatic lens of pure rock crystal, usually worn on a headband, helm, or pendant. It can store the memory of any one creation spell and repeat that spell at the wearer's command. Power for its spells must come from the wearer (or a ST Battery) at the normal cost. The Spell Crystal can be used in either of two ways: A) to double a spell as the wearer casts it, creating two gargoyles instead of one, for example, or B) to repeat a spell which the wearer has just cast; thus, having *just* summoned a gargoyle (or two, as in A), the wearer could use the Crystal to continue summoning one gargoyle per turn until he got bored or ran out of ST. The wearer may fight, move, cast other spells, etc., while the crystal repeats its spell, but once the repetition is stopped, the wearer cannot restart it without successfully casting a new spell. In TFT, the Spell Crystal is a greater magic item which takes 5 weeks to prepare and costs $12,500. The enchantment requires a suitable crystal ($500), 150 ST per day, and supplies worth $1559 per week: one dose of Telepathy potion ($1500), one parrot's tongue ($35), and $24 of common ingredients.

Summon Small Creature: Creation spell. Brings small non-magical creature the wizard specifies to do the wizard's bidding. Neither ST or IQ can be more than 6. Useful creatures include cats, dogs, monkeys, slinkers, ferrets, skunks, otters, hawks, bats, dragonets, snakes, scorpions, and so on. Might be: IQ 8, 1 ST to cast and 1 ST/turn to maintain. Note: If the wizard barely succeeds (i.e., makes the maximum possible successful roll), the GM may substitute any creature which is similar in some way to the one specified.

Rod of Aaron: Thrown spell. Might be around IQ 13 in TFT. Costs 3 ST to cast, 1 per minute to maintain. Makes limp things stiff while spell is on. Can be used to turn a vine into an impromptu pole or hook, to turn a rope ladder into a rigid one, to make a rowboat out of an appropriately shaped piece of oilcloth, and so on. Object should be laid out in the desired shape first; a single spell can affect only volumes of 2.5 cubic meters or less. The spell *can* be used on living things – it is much prized by courtesans, for example – but the cost to maintain it is 1 ST per *turn* if the target is resisting being stiffened. (A magic item based on this spell would cost about $6,500, should be wand-shaped, and must be touched to the item to be stiffened; the effect lasts as long as contact is maintained, at no ST cost.)

Second place goes to Theodore Miller (Howard Beach, NY) for a remarkably sinister gadget.

Rings of Dorian Gray. When each is worn by a living humanoid any physical change that would normally affect one wearer happens to the other wearer instead. This includes injury, disease, the effects of aging, magically-induced changes (polymorph, clumsiness, invisibility, etc.), energy drain, fatigue and rest, hunger and eating, normal or magical healing, and so on.

If one wearer dies the effect stops until someone else wears that ring, and all injury above that necessary to kill this wearer happens to the one being attacked. The rings may only be removed by Remove Curse, Wish, or the death of the wearer.

Player characters may discover either a single ring or a pair. Those finding only one ring from a pair, when the other is worn by a nonplayer character somewhere else, are likely to end up in unusual situations. For example, they may starve in the midst of plenty, since when they eat the other wearer feels full and doesn't eat, causing the player character to starve. A player character with one ring may wade through melees without being harmed, but only until the other wearer dies, or ends it by attempting suicide, which will kill the player character instead.

A player character who discovers or produces a pair of rings may avoid the effects of aging by giving the other to a young character, buy a slave to take injuries for him, and so on. A reverse suicide is always possible, however, so that the player had better either make a good deal or hire some trustworthy guards to watch the other wearer.

And there were any number of excellent runners-up:

Place Exchange (alteration, MU spell)
Level: 6
Range: 6" +1"/level
Duration: Instantaneous
Area of Effect: 2 creatures
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 3 segments
Saving Throw: Special
Explanation/Description: By means of this spell, the magic-user can either change places with another creature or have two other creatures change places with each other. In order to effect this change, both creatures must be within the range of the spell and must have missed their saving throw (willing creatures need not make a saving throw). Creatures of animal or lower intelligence are not allowed a saving throw. This spell could affect undead, but those of more power than a skeleton or zombie get a saving throw at +2. The larger creature must have no more than 3 times the mass of the smaller one.

This spell could be used as a means of escape or as a combat spell. If a magic-user was in combat outside with an ogre, for example, he could have it change places with an eagle that is passing overhead. (In *Wizard* this spell would be

about I.Q. 16 and cost 2 strength points per megahex between the two parties.)

– George F. Hutchinson III

Soul Clone
Statistics: (For AD&D and Arduin Grimoire)
Level: 8
Range: Touch
Duration: Permanent
Area of Effect: Special
Casting Time: 2 hours
Saving Throw: Special
Mana Cost: 20
Explanation/Description: This spell creates an identical copy of the subject's mind and places it in a vessel where it will be at the command of the caster. The subject must either be willing or unconscious during the entire ceremony. The vessel into which the copy will be placed must have a value of at least 200 Gold Pieces per level of the subject. If the subject is willing, no saving throw is made, however, if he is unwilling and unconscious, a saving throw is made. If the throw is within 2 of the required number, the copy is made and implanted in the vessel, but the caster has no control over it. If the throw is 3 or more above the necessary roll, the spell has no effect and the subject becomes conscious; 3 or more below, and it is successful. Once it is in the vessel, it is under the control of the caster. It must answer any questions put to it by the caster (it can speak), but it can say anything it wants to at any time. The copy does not retain any spell ability unless it is subject to above saving throw situation, in which case it has the full spell ability of the original subject and is not under the control of the caster.

– Carl M. Brashear

Clingfire (Evocation, MU spell)
Level: 1
Range: 6" +1"/level
Duration: Special
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 3 segments
Saving Throw: none
Explanation/Description: This spell shoots flaming liquid on one or more creatures in a 10 ft. or more area. The liquid burns longer than oil and cannot be put out by normal means. It can be stored in special *enchanted* jars for a number of days equal to the level of the spell caster. The damage, if on one creature, is 2-12 the first round, 1-6 the second round, and 1-4 each successive round. The duration is three rounds plus 1 round for every level above 5 (i.e. a 7th level M-U would have 5 rounds of damage: 2-12, 1-6, 1-4, 1-4, 1-4). The flame can also be sprayed over the whole 10 ft. area, doing 1-3, 1-2, 1 and 1 more for each successive round of burning (i.e. 7th level, 4 trolls: each takes 1-3, 1-2, 1 and 1 [roll separately for each]). When sprayed, each creature over 5 per flask lowers burning time by 1 round (i.e. 4 trolls burn normally, but 6 trolls -1 round, etc.). For every 5 levels, the caster can use 1 oil flask and do 10 sq. ft. area (e.g. a 15 level caster can use three flasks and do 30 ft. area, 15 creatures). Material components for this spell are one or more flasks of oil, and a pinch of sulfur mixed into each flask.

– Mark Oxner

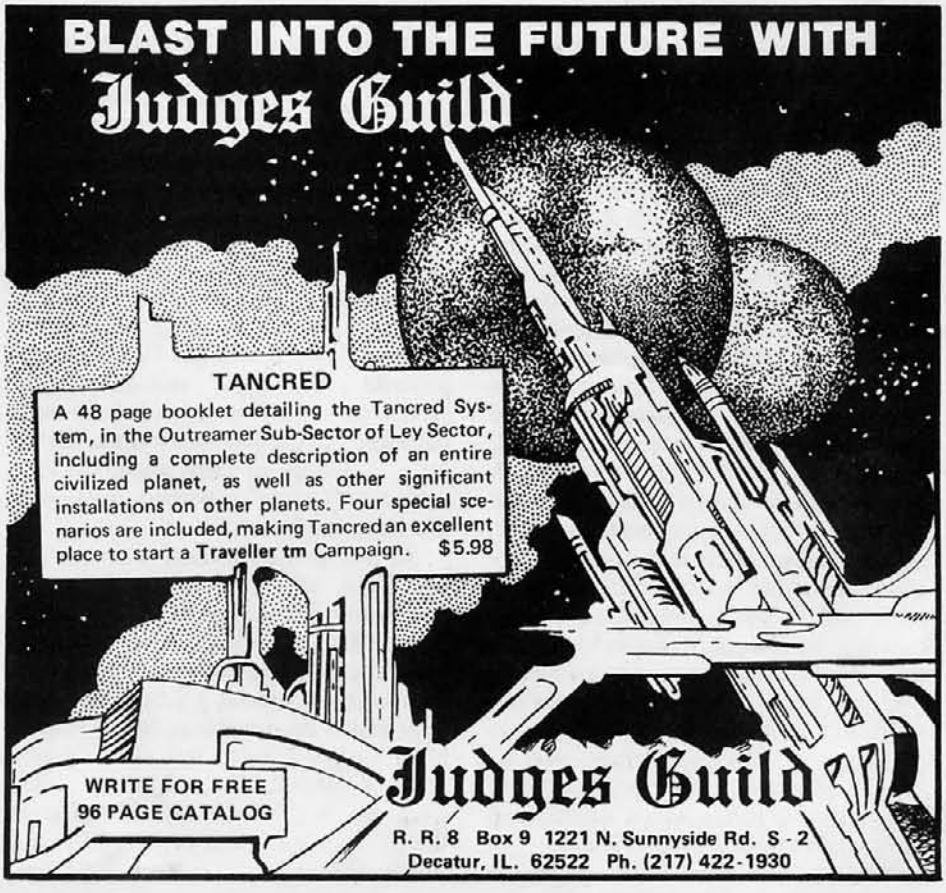
Mapping Potion: Endows user with the ability to sense his location accurately, including his direction and distance from any known reference point, and to remember accurately any path actually taken by the user. Lasts 1 day. In TFT, requires the brains of 20 homing pigeons ($3 each), and five weeks to make. Costs $300.

Ring of Direction: When the wearer concentrates on a place which is personally known to him, the Ring will tingle if the finger it is on is pointed in the direction of that place; the strength of the sensation is inversely proportional to the distance. In addition, the wearer may use that finger to trace (on a map, etc.) an accurate rendering of any path he has taken within the past 48 hours *while wearing the ring*. May also be set in a headband or helm and worn on the forehead, in which case it tingles when the wearer *looks* in the right direction and allows him to retrace a path with his eyes while walking or looking at a map. Worn this way, it is a lesser magic item, costs $3000, and takes 3 weeks to make, starting with a gold ring or nugget worth $70 and using 120 ST per day and one dose of Mapping Potion ($300) per week.

(Obviously, there could also be a *Location Spell* – perhaps IQ 11, costing 1 ST per 5 minutes, or something like that.)

– Susan Kauffman

Smoke (C)/IQ-12: Fills one hex with thick, yellow, roiling clouds of noxious smoke, extending some 3 meters into the air. A hex may be smoked while a figure is in it. Figures may move freely through or into smoked hexes. A figure attacking from or through a smoke hex does so at a -4DX; any attack *into* a smoke hex is at a -2DX. Any figure who moves into a smoke hex and stops (to attack, disbelieve, etc.) takes 1 hit of Fatigue damage due to smoke inhalation. Any figure present in a hex when it is first smoked must make a 4-die roll vs. DX. Success means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the figure held his breath and jumped away into an adjacent hex; failure means the figure takes 1 hit of Fatigue damage. Cost for this spell: 2 ST. Note: This spell would probably also be available in 4- and 7-hex forms. I recommend that the 4-hex version be an IQ-14, 4 ST Cost spell and that the 7-hex version be an IQ-16, 6 ST Cost spell.

Zone of Silence (C)/IQ-14: This spell creates a magical barrier to sound. A Zone of Silence will prevent all sound of any type or strength from passing through it, as well as any sound originating in the affected area. It will NOT stop light, Insubstantial beings, or in fact anything physical, just sound. Basic ST cost is 3 to cover an area within 1 hex of the wizard; range can be increased by 1 hex in all directions for each additional ST point the wizard puts into it. Duration of this spell is 3 turns, but this too may be increased (no matter what its range) at a cost of 1 ST per turn. Example: A wizard wishes to cast a Zone of Silence over an area 3 hexes from his own hex for 4 turns. It costs him 3 ST to cast it, plus 2 ST for extending it an additional 2 hexes, plus 1 more ST to hold it an extra turn, for a total ST cost of 6 ST. If the wizard is killed or goes unconscious, the Zone will lift. The Zone CAN be adjusted to affect a *part* of an area, if the wizard so desires.

If a Zone of Silence only *partially* restricts the "flow of sound" (that is, if sound can still find some path around the Zone), subtract 1 MH from the distance the sound carries for each hex covered by the Zone.

Force Field (C)/IQ-25: This spell will create a magical barrier that will stop almost *anything* – spells, physical attacks, illusions, images, summoned beings, etc. It *does not* affect spells already cast, and will *not* prevent Demons, astral bodies, or Insubstantial figures from crossing it. When a spell is cast on a figure protected by a Force Field, the wizard casting the spell loses the full ST cost for that spell, because it succeeded but was nullified. Physical attacks against a figure protected by a Force Field are conducted normally, except that no harm is done to the protected figure (no matter what the die roll is). Costs 20 ST to cast, plus 5 ST per turn it is maintained. Range is 1 hex from the wizard's hex; this may be extended at a cost of 5 ST *per hex* (not per extra hex of range). This spell may NOT be removed by a Dissolve Enchantment, although of course a Wish will remove it. The catch: (1) It takes 5 undisturbed turns to construct a Force Field; any disturbance of the wizard constructing it costs the wizard 1 ST and forces him to start over. (2) When the first attack is made against the Force Field, the wizard who constructed it must make a 5-die saving roll on IQ; failure means the Force Field is faulty and offers NO protection.

– Steve Woodcock

Bats Out of Hell (C)/IQ-15: TFT: Brings 1d6 x 100 common bats out of a fiery hole which briefly appears in the floor (or ground). These are not vampire bats and will not attack. Their main usefulness is to provide a diversion or cover a retreat. A dense cloud of several hundred bats emerging from a flaming pit could make it difficult for your opponents to see you. This spell is also useful in impressing peasants. Cost: 3 ST. Bats remain for 3 turns at no additional cost.
AD&D: (conjuration/summoning, MU spell)
Level: 4
Range: 3"
Duration: 2 rounds +1 round/level
Area of Effect: Special
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 3 segments
Saving Throw: none
Explanation/Description: Upon casting this spell the magic-user causes a seething cloud of 100-600 bats to erupt from a glowing hole in the floor. The bats will occupy a 1" square area and completely block out vision through this area for 1 round per 100 bats. The material components are a vial of bat's blood and a small amount of sulfur.

– Michael J. Vande Bunt

Mobius Ladder: A ladder runs through the center of an open shaft in the center of a room in a dungeon. The shaft extends for three levels, though it seems endless. When someone climbs through the ceiling of the top level he enters the floor of the bottom level on the opposite side of the ladder and vice versa.

– James H. Kelley

Death Disc: This spell generates one or more magical metal discs three feet in diameter, with razor sharp edges. The disc floats 3½ feet above the ground and travels at about 60mph in a straight line in whatever direction the wizard wishes. It can usually cut an unarmored person in half.

At a higher level spell the discs can be "pre-programmed" to hover in a still position until triggered by something such as body heat or movement. A set of discs set up this way at one end of a long narrow room makes an effective trap.

The discs are very strong, stronger than any natural metal, and very thin; almost invisible if viewed edge-on.

The discs move so fast that they are very hard to dodge, but since they move at a fixed height they'll miss someone who has ducked, or a very short hobbit. Also, a strong fighter with a good shield should be able to block or deflect a disc.

The disc dissolves after it hits a target, or its straight line motion is broken. Maximum range depends on level (D&D) or ST used (TFT).

– Iain Delaney

Contest

Rarely do two sides battle with identical units. A force's machines may be comparable to its foe's (i.e., Tigers and T-34s) – but not identical. So far, for *Ogre/GEV*, we've seen the Combine's cybertanks – the Ogres – and the Paneuropean light units. No pictures have been published for the Combine's tanks, GEVs, etc. . . . and all we know about the Paneuropean "Fencer" cybertank is its name and the specs from *GEV*.

So this month's contest is for the artists. Draw one or all of the "missing" units. Any size and style is acceptable: color, B&W, blueprints . . . whatever you like. The artist of the best rendition of each unit will receive a 6-issue TSG sub. That makes six possible winners: Fencer, HVY Tank, LT Tank, MSL Tank, Howitzer, and MHWZ. The GEV is excluded from the list; we already have a great design for the Combine's GEV, and you'll see it soon.

Any design that's good enough to win will also be used in preparing the artwork for the new editions of *Ogre* and *GEV*. In other words, the final designs will be based on the contest winners. Winners will be chosen on the basis of convincing design *first*, and artistic merit second.

All entries become the property of TSG. We reserve the right to award fewer prizes if no entries of publishable quality are received in some categories. Entries must be postmarked no later than May 31, 1981.

CORRECTION

Last month's contest contained two typographical errors which affect victory. The enemy infantry units listed at 1813 and 1914 should be at 0813 and 0914, respectively.

If anyone manages a win with the positions as listed (or figures out the proper positions and the right answer) we'll award the prizes as promised. HOWEVER – we will ALSO award prizes to the first three right answers that mention this correction. Other rules are as explained in TSG 38. Sorry about the error; death to gremlins!

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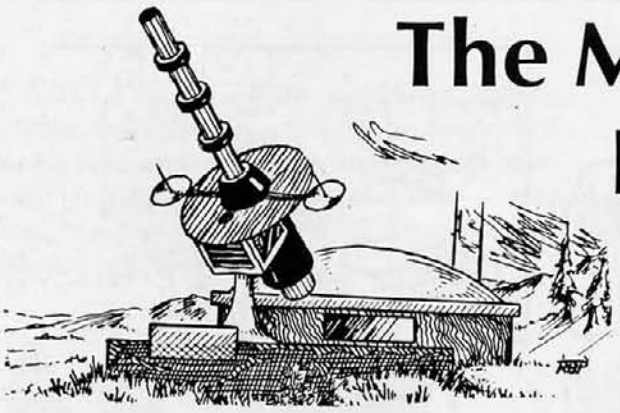

The Morrow Project

by William A. Barton

Rumor has it that a group of Michigan wargamers was busily working away, designing a science fiction role-playing game set in a post-holocaust world in which players were forced to struggle to survive against a hostile environment, latent radioactivity and savage mutants, when they heard of TSR's impending release of *Gamma World* – a SF role-playing game set in a post-holocaust world in which players were forced to struggle to survive against a hostile environment, latent radioactivity and savage mutants . . .

Bowing to TSR's professional status, the Michigan gamers, admittedly amateurs, shelved their project. Then they beheld *Gamma World*, with its improbable futuristic weapons (liberally mixed with primitive spears and swords), strange alliances and mutated humans and animals that seemed more refugees from the *AD&D Monster Manual* than evolutionary developments. So, they took up their pens again. Their long, interrupted labor at last produced THE MORROW PROJECT – what may prove to be the most creditable post-holocaust RPG to date.

Now before anyone out there groans something about *Gamma World* clones, let me assure you that, beyond the basic premise and a few unavoidable similarities (radiation zones, ruined cities, mutants, etc.), I've found the two games to be quite different. Whereas *GW* can only be classed as a science *fantasy* game, THE MORROW PROJECT appears to be truly a *science fiction* RPG. With a few minor lapses, TMP is firmly based on reasonable scientific extrapolation within its given premises. There are no "black rays" or "protein disruptors," no genetically absurd DNA-freaks, no impossible killer warbots – mostly good ol' hard-core SF with near-future technology.

Realism is central to THE MORROW PROJECT. Its designers have labored to avoid stretching anyone's suspension of belief. Hence the inclusion only of existing weapons systems and those not too far beyond present capabilities, the limiting of most mutants to evolutionally feasible survival-oriented changes and the presentation of a believable – if not completely desirable – picture of post-holocaust America.

The game itself begins with WWIII, 1989 – or at least the GM's part does. It is his responsibility to map out the various impact sites of the Russian missiles that destroyed the U. S. prior to the actual start of play. TMP is quite detailed on this aspect of the game. More than five full pages are devoted to the war and the various cities and installations, broken down state by state, serving as ground zero for Soviet ICBMs, from MIRVs to biological warheads. Charts are devoted to performance capabilities of each type of missile loosed at Uncle Sam, how much punch the warheads have, how to calculate blast, fire and radiation zones – even whether missiles are land- or sub-based. And if the preprogrammed blueprint for destruction isn't enough for some GM's tastes, the game provides 150 random missiles for the GM to lob wherever his bloodthirsty heart pleases. Remember that little town with the speed trap where they nailed you for $30? Hit it with an SS-N-8! The city where the ex-girlfriend who dumped you lives? Smack an SS-18M1b biowarhead on it! (Be the first on your block to be the last on your block!)

Some may wish to dispense with much of the wholesale devastation involved in this portion of the game, getting on with the business of play. It will be necessary, though, for the GM to at least map out impact sites in the general area where his particular team of players will be operating.

The war over, play may begin. You see, player-characters are all members of the Morrow Project, a group of civilian volunteers cryogenically frozen in hidden bases across the country. Their mission? To emerge from their hibernation following the holocaust, locate hidden supply caches and rendezvous at Prime Base so the group can begin the long process of rebuilding civilization. The problem is that Prime Base has been knocked out by another group of survivors, delaying the wake-up signal 150 years. The volunteers wake to a vastly changed – and quite hostile – world. Each team knows only the location of its own supply caches and must survive long enough to locate the remains of Prime Base. Therein lies the meat of the game: survival.

Morrow Teams seem well-equipped to do just that. Looking at the impressive array of equipment available, one may not think their task so difficult. Teams may find themselves with any of some 34 different firearms ranging from pistols, rifles, submachine guns and shotguns to grenade launchers, mortars, flamethrowers and lasers. The weapons a player gets are apparently determined by the referee (the rules are a bit hazy on this point), who also chooses the type of team the players are to portray – either recon, scientific, MARS (Mobile Assault, Rescue and Strike) or specialty teams – and may be forced to assign individual jobs in case the players' choices fail to make a balanced team. Jobs may range from driver to doctor to KP.

Simulation purists will love the sections on weaponry. Instead of blasters, black ray guns or energy maces, as appear in *Gamma World*, THE MORROW PROJECT features Stoner carbines, Uzi submachine guns, M-16s and Atchisson assault shotguns. Nearly half of the two-page bibliography at the back of the rulebook lists military manuals as reference works, reflecting once again the designers' penchant for realism.

Morrow Project vehicles are well-conceived, too. These range from the lightly armed and armored airscouts, hovercraft and jeeps to the medium-armored commando vehicles and up to the special heavy vehicles, the Scientific-One mobile laboratory and the MARS-One military vehicle (a separate set of blueprints of the latter is available for anyone so inclined). The MARS-One, I might add, is easily recognizable as the Land Master

from the movie *Damnation Alley*. So that the awesome fire power of the MARS-One (20mm cannons, flame guns, mortars, machineguns, missiles and mounted Claymores) doesn't unbalance the game, however, only four exist – and one of these is at Prime Base, the location of which is unknown to the players. Thus the chance of a team beginning the game with one is slim – unless the GM desires a lot of carnage early on.

Morrow teams are certainly well-equipped. But what of the characters manning the hardware? Character generation in THE MORROW PROJECT is relatively routine, the only major difference from other systems being that characteristics are determined by a 4D6-4 roll, resulting in the unusual range of 0 (!) to 20 in each of seven attributes: strength, constitution, dexterity, accuracy, charisma, psi and luck. Strength and constitution determine, among other things, how much damage of various sorts the character can take. Dexterity is a measure of how many actions he can take during a round. Accuracy is the determiner of how well he can hit with a weapon. (There are no skills to learn as in, say, *Traveller* or *Space Opera*.) Charisma is no different than in other RPGs; psi measures psionic potential; and luck is the factor used for saving throws, lucky shots and anything else the GM doesn't want to make an arbitrary decision on. TMP is unusual in that it makes no provision for IQ, the rationale perhaps being that Morrow volunteers by nature possess high intelligence. Secondary characteristics include blood and structure points, which are calculated from strength and constitution. The loss of too many of either of these could spell doom for a character. Percentages of Bps and Sps must be calculated per body part, too, and even blood type must be rolled up in case a transfusion becomes necessary.

Few guidelines are given the GM on getting the characters into play. I suppose the authors assumed most players and GMs would be experienced enough not to need any. Less than a page is devoted to this aspect of the game. Unless the referee is a total novice, however, he shouldn't have much trouble. Players should have no trouble at all. All the rules are well-written, clear and easy to follow. The most complicated part of the game is probably the combat system, and if followed carefully, even this should prove self-explanatory. A character need only roll one less than his accuracy factor on 1D20, taking in account variables such as range, visiblity, target size, weapon used or automatic fire. Penetration is then determined by calculating a weapon's penetration rating and cross-referencing it with the target's armor class. Determining damage is perhaps the most realistic – and therefore most complex – part of the whole system, including hit locations, death percentages, shock, blood loss, burn damage, poisons and an admirable system for determining cumulative radiation damage. One player in a Morrow tournament at an area con, his character lying bleeding in a blast crater, was heard to exclaim incredulously, "Hey, this is *real*!"

The post-war world of TMP is nearly as well-designed as its combat system. Rules for weather, technology, ruins, NPC reactions and the types of encounters Morrow teams may experience enrich the background settings. Specific encounters are governed by geographical location and may encompass run-ins with groups including bikers, gypsy truckers, new American Indians, the "frozen chosen," left-over American commandos and misplaced Soviet survivors, regular animal encounters, or mutants.

Though some of TMP's encounter groups do reek a bit of *Gamma World*'s cryptic alliances, the designers have avoided the too-easy temptation to go overboard. The few minor excesses that managed to creep in (as when a character gets hit on the head by Bigfoot) can easily be dismissed in the spirit of fun.

THE MORROW PROJECT does have its problems. The section on psionics is so sketchy as to be almost worthless. However, few characters will do much with psionics anyway. Several omissions occur in connection with the fauna encounter table. Of several animals listed, from alligators to poisonous insects, only the mammals and the rare or mutated species are descibed in game terms at all. And while THE MORROW PROJECT is not the typographical monstrosity that *Space Opera* proved to be, more than a few errors can be found on its pages.

Still, overall, I'd have to give THE MORROW PROJECT the highest of ratings as a SF role-playing system. If it isn't at least nominated for the Origins awards this year, there just ain't no justice in gameland.

THE MORROW PROJECT is designed by Kevin Dockery, Robert Sadler and Richard Tucholka and is published by Timeline, Inc., 31316 Carmody Dr., Warren, Michigan 48092. The rulebook sells for $12; Gamemaster's Shield, $5; Gamemaster's packages of vehicular and personnel basic loads are $7 and $9 respectively; blueprints of the MARS vehicle are $6.

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Rumor Reliability in *Traveller*

by Steve Winter

One of the most valuable commodities for player-characters in *Traveller* is information. A false rumor can launch a bogey chase halfway across known space, costing thousands of credits and maybe a few lives.

The problem facing the referee is: what kind of rumors and stories has a character heard during his "prior service"? After all, characters spend a considerable amount of time travelling the galaxy before actual play begins, and that time should be taken into account somehow. Secondly, referees need some consistent way of handling informants.

A simple table (see below) can solve this problem. A 2d throw, modified by the character's age and experience (referee's discretion) determines what he has heard about a subject. Informants are treated exactly like player characters, although some results on the table have different meanings for informants than they have for player-characters.

Rumor Table
(player-characters/informants)

2	inaccurate, believed
3	inaccurate, repeated
4	inaccurate, rumors
5	no information/inaccurate, rumors
6	partial
7	no information/partial
8	partial
9	no information/partial
10	accurate, rumors
11	accurate, rumors
12	accurate, repeated/second hand
13+	accurate, believed/first hand

The results should be interpreted as follows:

inaccurate, believed: The character has heard the same story several times from reliable sources, and he believes it. The story is either misleading or totally false.

inaccurate, repeated: The character has heard the same or similar stories repeated by several sources which may or may not have been reliable. The character doesn't necessarily believe the stories, but they do carry the weight of repetition. They are misleading or totally false.

inaccurate, rumors: The character has heard of the subject once before, but he has no idea whether the story he heard was true or not. It wasn't.

no information/inaccurate, rumors: A player character has never before heard of the object, person or phenomenon being investigated. Treat as inaccurate, rumors, for an informant.

partial: This character knows a little, but not much, about the subject. His information may or may not be helpful. There is always a 1/6 chance that it is false.

no information/partial: Player characters have no information, informants have partial information.

accurate, rumors: Same as inaccurate, rumors, except the story was partially or completely true.

accurate, repeated/second hand: For player characters, same as inaccurate, repeated, except the information is true. Informants may claim to have known or spoken with someone who had firsthand knowledge of, or saw computer files on, or otherwise came into direct contact with the subject under investigation.

accurate, believed/firsthand: Same as inaccurate, believed, except the stories were partially or completely true. If this is an informant, he has firsthand experience with the subject.

The referee should not disclose the actual result of the die roll, but determine the result secretly and present information to the players as they would have heard it. These stories can be as colorful or as bland as the referee cares (or is able) to make them, but it's a good idea to plan a few ahead so the players won't get suspicious. If the stories aren't plausible, you won't fool anybody.

In addition, informants should always get a reaction roll. A source with accurate information could refuse to talk to the players. Even worse, a source with misinformation could be extremely helpful, supplying maps, codes, or charts which are all wrong.

Informants who are extremely hostile or who have refused a bribe may also lie to characters. Consult the following table:

Die modifiers:

bribe offer rejected	+1
reaction roll = 5	+1
4	+2
3	+3

source automatically lies on 2d roll of 13+

Since any single informant can be quite unreliable or unhelpful, it is a good idea to let players roll more often for informant encounters than for patrons. Two or three rolls per week, with appropriate DMs for Streetwise, Carousing, Liason and Administrative Experience, is usually sufficient. The Patron Table works very well for determining the general character of informants.

Although this system was designed for *Traveller,* there's no reason why it could not be used in other role-playing systems like D&D or TFT. The table remains the same; only the modifiers need to be changed.

Simple Traps

by Lewis Pulsipher

An experienced role-playing referee can draw on a repertoire of dozens of traps he's devised or experienced over the years, but a novice may find it hard to think of *simple*, effective traps which don't immediately kill — deathtraps aren't much fun. For the new referee's benefit, here are a few traps one step above the spikes-in-pit variety.

1. An alcove is built above a door in a room or corridor. Guards wait in the alcove, possibly using a listening hole to the outside (funnel shaped at one end so that sound travels mostly one way). When a party of adventurers enters the area there's a good chance they won't notice the alcove until it's too late to stop the enemy from jumping into the party to attack the vulnerable spell-casters.

2. A ledge extends along one wall over a chasm or pit. When the adventurers are strung out along the wall, secret doors open and enemies with long poles come out, pushing off those nearest and using the poles to lever other adventurers over the edge.

3. At the end of a room lies an altar, statue, jewel, or some other object of interest. When it is touched it activates the opening mechanism for doors near the entrance to the room, and from these issue monsters. Until then, these doors cannot be forced open from the main room.

4. When a given object is touched, a pit opens. The victim falls in and the pit cover shuts. A wall inside the pit pivots and a doppleganger or other imitative shape-changer is rotated into the pit, where it assumes the role of the victim. When the party gets the cover open they'll find their trapped comrade (they think) and a (false) door. It will look like the pit was designed to be a jail cell. The doppleganger can bide its time and then strike.

5. A large airtight room is occupied by a gelatinous cube or other flammable creature, which will usually be burned by the adventurers. Perhaps the party will feel safer about staying if the creature is in a pit or other area it cannot rapidly move out of. As the burning progresses, lack of oxygen or, more likely, a high concentration of carbon monoxide may overcome adventurers. Heat or pressure change might activate a door seal, as well.

6. In a deserted dungeon area, stairs lead downward from one door then back up to another door some 50 feet from the first and at the same level. Torches burn at intervals on the walls. Anyone descending may be overcome by carbon dioxide or monoxide fumes, produced by the torches, which accumulate at the lowest part of the area.

7. A series of small rooms with one-way doors leads to a treasure. The only way out is through more rooms occupied by gelatinous cubes or other creepy-crawlers. The adventurers will run out of oil (for burning the monsters) before they reach safety.

This is Free Trader Beowulf,
calling anyone. . .
Mayday, Mayday. . . we are under
attack. . . main drive is gone. .
turret number one not responding . . .
Mayday. . . losing cabin pressure
fast. . . calling anyone. . . please help. . .
This is Free Trader Beowulf. . .
Mayday. . .

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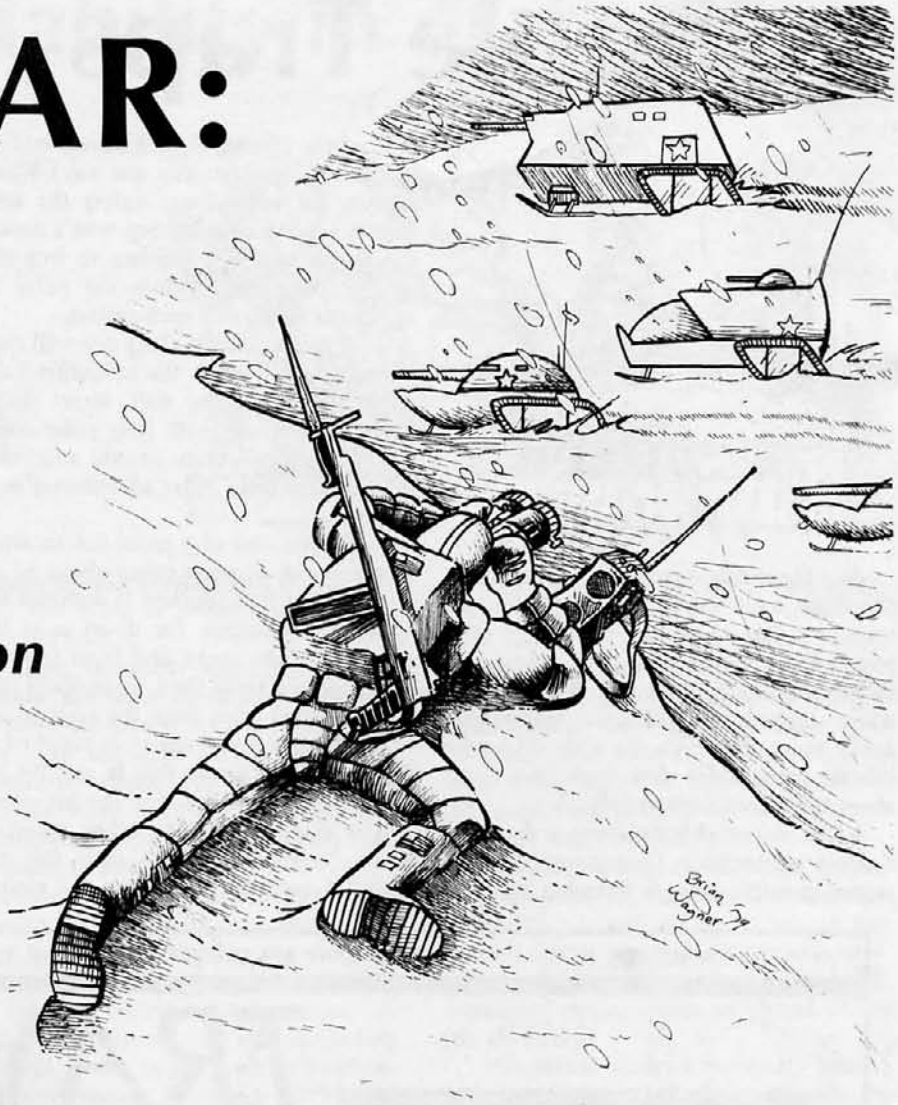
ICE WAR:

Playing the ESA



by Lawrence Person

Tired of playing the ESA player in *Ice War* and getting detected before you get to the first line of outposts? Do you get plastered with missiles and arrive at the oilfields with only a fraction of your force? Feel like giving it all up and going home to Moscow and becoming a dentist like your mother told you to do? Then cry no more.

The ESA actually has the advantage. This may be hard to believe for those who have felt despair at the US side's numerous detection devices, missile satellites, and cheap troops via reinforcements. The important thing to remember is to use the advantage of your invisibility to the fullest. A few strategies that have worked for me are:

Old Faithful

This is my standard attack. It is usually effective against the standard (1 missile satellite, 3 outposts) American setup. Initial Units: 1 command sled, 1 sled transport, 2 armored sleds, 8 armored hovercraft, 4 light hovercraft.

Opening Moves: This depends on the initial American setup. The US player will usually set up his outposts on hexes 1116, 1313, and 1611. This makes it necessary to send out your two armored sleds to destroy one outpost. The remainder of your force should be placed in one of the back row hexes. *Very* back, such as 0503 or 0602. Unless your opponent is a recon satellite freak, your chances of not being detected the first turn are good. It's downhill from there.

Shooting the Gap: The chances are good that at least one of your armored sleds will make it to an outpost and destroy it. Sometimes it gets tough when the US player uses recon sleds and hovercraft to close the gap. In a situation like that, and most of the time otherwise, the best move is to use your remaining sleds to knock out another outpost before taking on combat units. This gives your main force a wider "gap" to shoot through. If you have a situation where you have to deal with sleds and hovercraft as well as recon satellites, you have a chance to pass the outposts undetected only if two or more of them have already been destroyed.

The Attack: If you shoot the gap successfully, you should then have a sizable force at the feet of a group of poorly defended oilfields. If you were detected, you should still have a sizable force almost on top of your objective.

If you are undetected it would be best to split your forces up. Try to get your armored units to hexes 2423, 2323, 2324, and 2222. Thus, combat by-product conversion would become the US player's worst enemy. To keep you from destroying his oilfields he has to risk destroying them himself.

If your forces are detected early, or the US player prefers a large initial force to reinforcements, it becomes necessary to get down to the main battle. The first obstacle should be infantry units on Midway and Cross isles. But if your opponent was stupid enough to put tanks there, just bypass them and go on to the oilfields.

If you face infantry units on the islands, it may be wise to suicide your sled transport in an attack on the units at Cross and put the rest at 2021, 2020, and 2120 to attack Midway.

The two things to remember are: attack oilfield hexes before combat units, and always move onto as many oilfield hexes as possible.

The Hammer and the Sword

This works best against a player with a strong West flank. Initial Units: 1 command sled, 1 sled transport, 6 armored sleds, 8 armored hovercraft.

Opening Moves: Same as Old Faithful.

Shooting the Gap: Same as Old Faithful with the exception of the situation where there are hovercraft and/or recon sleds in the gap. With this strategy it would be best to reveal yourself just North of the gap and use your armored sleds to take out the opposing units. This will eliminate a force that could harass your rear later, and the sight of your armored sleds may panic your opponent into attempting a total conversion defense.

The Attack: It is best to roll back the west flank with your armored sleds — *provided* there are no infantry units on the islands. If there are, hit those with your armored sleds. In either case send your armored hovercraft through as soon as possible. It is also best not to leave your sleds on the ice, if at all possible, since combat conversion is a double-edged sword.

The Visible Hammer and the Invisible Dagger

This is for use against the player who goes overboard on the detection equipment. Initial Units: 1 command sled, 1 sled transport carrying 1 tank, 2 armored sleds, 8 armored hovercraft, 3 light hovercraft.

Opening Moves: The entire hovercraft force enters visible near the center of the board, and two armored sleds enter visible at 0510 and 1005, and the command sled, sled transport, and loaded tank, enter invisible at 0801. I enjoyed the look on the face of one detection-oriented player when I pulled this one on him! He thought 13 points of his initial setup was worthless. If he had counted the point value of my units, however, he would have found that there were four points worth of units missing and figured it out. Much to his sorrow, he didn't.

Shooting the Gap: Since most of your units are visible there is no need to shoot the gap. Just make sure all the outposts are destroyed to clear the way for your invisible units.

The Attack: This is where the dagger comes in. While your hovercraft attack as in Old Faithful, your invisible force moves to 2623. There the tank is unloaded. On the next turn your tank and sled transport move to 2423 if it is open, 2524 if it is not. In either case, you then proceed to blow away Deadhorse. If neither of these hexes are open, move to 2523 and convert 2423. In the first case, you get two conversions, as well as causing units from the central battle to be diverted. It also irritates your opponent to the point of chewing the carpet to spring a surprise like this on him.

The Two Missile Sled Offense

This is to throw your opponent a curve after using the other strategies. Initial Units: 1 command sled, 2 missile sleds with four missiles each, 2 armored sleds, 1 hovercraft transport, 6 armored hovercraft.

Opening Moves: Same as in Old Faithful.

Shooting the Gap: Same as Old Faithful, except if detected the missile sleds should fire as soon as they are within range of units on the islands, or the oilfields.

The Attack: Here is where the missile sleds come in. If your units are still undetected move them to 2019. When your turn comes destroy any units on either island. In the movement phase, move two of your hovercraft each to 2122, 2222, and 2322, your command sled to 2021, and your hovercraft transport to 2321. The missile sleds move to 2121 and 2221. The missiles, with the hovercrafts' attacks and the fact that they are sitting on two oilfields, should give you the game.

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GAME DESIGN: Theory and Practice

Part XIII: Playtesting

by Nick Schuessler and Steve Jackson

Playtesting is the process of playing a new game design, over and over, in order to spot flaws and improve playability. The importance of playtesting in the production of a finished game design cannot be overstated. Ninety percent of all game defects could have been corrected by satisfactory playtesting. There is no excuse for failure to playtest a design thoroughly before putting it on the market; it indicates either gross ignorance, total egotism, or an absolute lack of interest in giving the gamer his money's worth.

Good playtesting takes time and goes through several stages. But, like research, it is an unavoidable part of the design process. A company or designer that is unwilling to playtest games should be in another line of work – it's that simple.

The techniques used below, with variations, are used at one time or another by every professional designer and company. The advanced stages are often skipped – to the detriment of the final product – but it all starts with the designer's own testing.

Designer Playtesting

This is the first stage of playtesting. You've got a basic set of rules (typed legibly), a map, counters, and whatever else you need. Find one friend (or however many it takes for the game) and play it with him. At this stage, you should not yet be relying on the rules. Just tell him how to play. Both of you will be referring to the rules as necessary, but verbal instructions are a big time-saver. At this stage you're testing the *system*, not the actual text of the rules.

Play through as many times as you can. Whenever a problem crops up, *make a note*. Unless you run into a really bad glitch, it's best to play out each game with the rules you started with, rather than changing in mid-game. After each game finishes, discuss the notes, and decide what rule changes are necessary for the next game.

In playtesting, you are trying to build a game that meets several criteria:

(1) *Balance.* All players should have an equal chance to win. In cases where one side must inevitably be wiped out or driven away, use a "victory point" system to allow a good *player* to claim victory when his forces managed a good showing in defeat.

(2) *Variety.* The game should not be predictable. The longer it takes for the players to optimize their game strategy, the better. If you find that there is one best way to win, seriously consider changing the rules. Othewise, your final product may be boring.

(3) *Realism.* As a rule, a game becomes less playable as it becomes more realistic. The type of game will determine the amount of realism your gamers will require (or tolerate). In general, historical games are expected to be more complex, and therefore more realistic, than small ones. A game that plays quickly and well can get away with less realism than one whose mechanics are cumbersome.

By the playtest stage, you will already have decided how much realism you *want*; your research and original drafts will have been appropriately detailed. Playtesting will tell you (a) whether your attempts at realism have made the rules too cumbersome, and (b) whether the game *results* are realistic. An example from my own experience: The counter values, combat rules, etc., of *One Page Bulge* have very little detail – they are not highly "realistic." This was deliberate, for simplicity's sake. My objective was to write simple rules that nevertheless interacted to give a course of play similar to that of the actual Ardennes offensive. Playtesting of the first version proved this was not working out. Therefore, the rules were changed – not made more complex, just changed – and tested again. Eventually a game was achieved in which the use of historical strategies will give very nearly historical results. It is therefore reasonable to assume that changed strategies will mirror the "historical" effect of use of those strategies on the battlefield, which is what simulation is all about. And *extensive* playtesting was necessary to achieve this.

(4) *Playability.* This is an omnibus term, taking in many things: rules clarity, speed and ease of play, "interestingness" of each turn and of the game as a whole, and the whole *gestalt* of the game. The nastiest thing you can say about a game is that it's unplayable. An unplayable game is a failure, pure and simple.

Rules clarity will be checked in the blindtesting stage, but start on it now. Any time your first playtesters tell you they can't understand what they've read – listen!

Speed and ease of play will become quickly apparent. If you spend more time looking up rules and doing bookkeeping than you do moving counters – if you have to move *lots* of counters in very predictable fashion – if information is not centralized and cross-referenced – people are less likely to play the game.

As for interest: the harder it is for you to keep your playtesters playing, the less interesting your game is!

A buyer usually expects playability in inverse proportion to realism. Therefore, fantasy and SF are expected to be more playable than historical, and small games will usually be more playable than large ones. Even its designers admit that the historical monstergame *Campaign for North Africa* is not meant to be played – just admired for its research – but people buy it anyway!

If you want a successful game, give your buyer at least as much realism as he expects from that "class" of game, and LOTS more playability – or vice versa – and he'll love you.

Blindtesting

When you feel that you have the rules the way you want them, and that the game works, you're ready for the second stage of playtest: blindtesting. The essence of blindtesting is that new playtesters are exposed to the game *without* the benefit of advice from the designer or other experienced players.

The purest form is blindtesting by mail: send off copies of the rules and all other materials to friends (game clubs, etc.) in other parts of the country. Ask them to play as many times as they can, and to send their results, rule questions, and general reactions back to you.

A modified blindtest can be achieved by recruiting some new local playtesters, handing them the game, and watching . . . *quietly*. Simply explain that you want to see whether the rules are good enough for them to figure the game out without help. You can learn more from watching a blindtest session than you can if you work by mail, but it's hard to resist the temptation to explain things, correct illegal play, or bawl players out for misreading something you thought was totally clear.

Whichever way you do it, blindtesting is necessary. It will tell you which of your rules are ambiguous or unnecessary. It may also reveal some strategies you hadn't considered, or (if realism is a cri-

terion) bring up problems there. Strangely, some of the biggest companies don't blindtest much, if at all (or don't listen to the blindtesters!). I can tell which ones they are, just by reading the rules they print. So can you; they're the games that don't quite work, and raise questions they fail to answer.

Proof Playtesting

This is the last stage of playtest – the stage that is omitted by almost every company, and the stage that would eliminate 95% of the "errata sheets" in the hobby *if manufacturers would just take the time.*

Unfortunately, time is money – and the very nature of proof playtesting requires an extra delay of two weeks to a month before the game is published.

Proof playtesting is an extra stage of blindtesting *and* another round of designer playtesting . . . using only "proof copies" of the finished rules, maps, and charts. In other words, once the game is totally ready to print, and all of the final art and pasteup is done – once *everything* is ready for the printers – you stop right there, make a dozen copies, and playtest again.

If you've done everything right so far, there will be no design flaws left at this stage. What you'll catch with proof playtesting are the killer typographical and pasteup errors: a town left off the map, a line left off a chart, a paragraph left out of the rules – or just a number typed wrong, messing up your setup rules or your victory conditions. These small errors can drive players mad – and mere proofreading won't find them all! Proofreaders are good at finding misspelled words and sentences that end in the middle. They're *not* good at noticing total omissions. You, the designer, *might* notice an omission . . . but by now you're so familiar with the game that you see what you expect to see.

Proof playtesting is the answer. Make those proof copies and turn some new playtesters loose on them. If your basic design is good, they'll be playing just as though they had bought the game in a store. And when (not if, but *when*) they run into a rules typo, you'll still have time to fix it. No player frustration, and no expensive, embarrassing errata sheets.

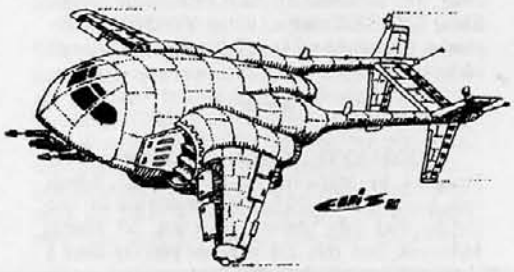
Special Problems

The easiest game to playtest is a game where both sides have identical forces, attacking on a symmetrical map. More complicated setups provide more richness – and correspondingly more playtest is required. Some things to watch for:

Building scenarios. If players may choose their own beginning forces, or build reinforcements, according to some kind of "point system," you must test every possible combination of forces they can achieve. Some types of units become disproportionately powerful in numbers – like the "fuzzy-wuzzy" mob attack of the GEVs in the first edition of *Ogre*. You may control this by making units more expensive, changing their abilities, or just limiting the counters available.

Monstergames. If a game takes two full days to play through, you *know* you won't get through many playtests. Make the most of the ones you have.

Multiplayer diplomatic games. Such games can be self-balancing, in that the weaker players will combine against the strongest. Just make sure they're not *too* balanced. Someone needs to win eventually. *Cosmic Encounter* is an example of a game with a good solution to this problem.



RPG supplements. The bigger the role-playing game, and the more material that is already available for it, the more closely a supplement must be checked. A *D&D* or *Traveller* supplement ought to be compatible with literally millions of words of existing game material.

Refereed games. If solution of some problems is left to the referee, you should playtest with many different referees to see whether things can get out of hand under some interpretations of the rules.

Playtest Techniques

Several techniques are especially valuable, both in designer playtesting and in blindtesting. The designer should try all these things, but blindtesters should be encouraged to try them too. Show them a copy of this article . . .

Try the dumb strategies. This is my biggest single piece of playtest advice; I've been saying it for years, and I'll say it for years more. Just because something seems ridiculous in real life, don't assume it won't work in your game. Try it! If your Civil War simulation consistently lets infantrymen charge uphill and take entrenched positions from equal forces, something is terribly wrong. A good Civil War gamer would never try that at all – so make sure you have a couple of ignorant (or at least patient) playtesters to help you.

Idiots make good playtesters. Some of my best playtesters have been people I would *never* play with for pleasure. They nit-pick at rules, find impossible meanings in simple statements, botch setups – a couple of them have been cheaters. If people like this can play a game properly, without driving the others at the table totally up the wall – that game is probably airtight.

Geniuses are helpful, too. If you know any true experts in the field you're gaming (even if they don't play wargames themselves), ask for their help. They'll be complimented; they'll also be useful. And a hard-core, full-time, professional fanatic gamer is the best playtester you can get. He'll play for blood, wringing every possible advantage out of the rules. And, unlike the idiot, he'll probably have some very constructive suggestions to make after he's through.

You can never playtest too many times. I think one of the reasons that micro-sized games became popular was that, being small and quick, they had often received more testing than larger games. And, as a rule, more testing means a better game. Not always! I know of a tremendously popular game that was *never* played by anyone but the designer until it had been published. (It's got problems, but people play it and like it.) Playtest until you drop.

Keep up with your changes. When you find an unplayable rule, note it on the rule manuscript. When your manuscript becomes illegible, retype it . . . as often as necessary. (Word processors are incredibly useful for this.) If you fail in this, your playtesters will be playing a game that has nothing to do with the rules draft you're working from. Blindtesting will catch this, if you blindtest. But I've read of one SPI project that totally bombed because the designer failed to notice that the playtesters had changed all his rules as they went along. The playtesters had a pretty good game worked out, but the designer never found out what it was . . . and *his* version fell flat.

Playtester Credits

I hope I've convinced you that playtesters perform an invaluable service, and are necessary aides to a professional designer. As such, they deserve appropriate recognition and compensation. Any playtesters who provide significant input should be listed in the game credits and should receive a free copy of the game. They've earned it.

Next Month: RPG Design

Capsule Reviews

THE SPACE GAMER reviews board games, role-playing games, computer games, video games, and game supplements. We review play-by-mail games if a reviewer is enrolled. We will review any science fiction or fantasy game if the publisher supplies a copy. We do not guarantee reviews of historical wargames. TSG may publish a review of a game we are not sent – IF a reader submits a review.

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★★★

Games for which reviews have been assigned or received include: *The Best of the Journal, The Blade of Allectus, The C&S Sourcebook, D&D Geomorphs, Dragon Pass, Dungeon Drawings, Furioso, High Guard* (2nd ed.), *Nebula 19, Sewers of Oblivion, Swords & Sorcerers, Thieves' Guild, Triplanetary,* and *Who-Dun-It?*

Specific games for which we are seeking reviewers include: *Action & Bumping Games, Cartels & Cutthroat$, Dark Stars, The Dragonlords, The Hammer of Thor, Interstellar Skirmishes, IPSP/ISIS Maps, Kung Fu 2100, Milestones, Space Ace 21,* and *Swordquest* (boxed ed.).

★★★

APOCALYPSE (Games Workshop); $20. Designed by Mike Hayes. Boxed, with 3-page rule book, 16" x 22" board mounted in two pieces, 700 thin, die-cut counters, 35 plastic warheads, one die. 2-4 players; playing time 2 hours up. Published 1980.

APOCALYPSE, "the game of nuclear devastation," in many ways is similar to *Risk*. Opposing forces wage war over Europe, North Africa, and the seas around them in an effort to be the last surviving power. The map is divided into 270 regions. New armies are issued at the beginning of each player's turn, based on his position and total territory; he uses these to grab more territory. Each successful attack allows the player to either build a new bomb or extend the range of a pre-existing warhead. Warheads may be used at the beginning of a player's turn to devastate one targeted region and all other regions adjacent to it. The targeted region becomes radioactive, and may not be entered until it is "reconstructed." The combat system is innovative, with the defender required to guess the number of armies (1-6) the attacker is committing. If he guesses correctly, the attacker loses that many armies. If not, the defender loses one army. The supply system is also interesting. Each region is identified as a city, or urban, rural, mountain, waste, or sea region. An additional army is generated by every city, every two urban regions, every three rural regions, etc. This system has its effects on strategy, until an empire covers a quarter or more of the board. At that point, strategy is pretty well lost in the oft-repeated and laborious task of counting your way through the empire four times over to determine the exact number of reinforcements.

There is one serious glitch in the rules. Attacks into a sea region automatically succeed, even if from another sea region. Attacks from one sea region to another should probably be resolved as per regular combat. Also, it is advisable to end the game when one player is receiving most of the armies – say 60%, or 70%. Otherwise the endgame becomes a grind.

The graphics and component design are up to Games Workshop's usual high standard. The rules are short and clear. I would consider recommending APOCALYPSE if an equivalent game wasn't on the market at a cheaper price. *Risk*, as I said above, is very similar, and suggested retail is $13.

– David Ladyman

DUEL ARCANE (Gamelords, Ltd); $3.95. Designed by John Shannonhouse. One 8½" x 5½" 28-page booklet, extra character record sheets, errata sheet, ziplocked. Two players; playing time 5-10 minutes per combat. Published 1980.

This is a familiar subject with a familiar format: a game of combat between magicians, introduced by a short narrative. But the resemblance to *Wizard* and its illegitimate offspring ends there. DUEL ARCANE concerns shapeshifters, not spellcasters; instead of Gandalf vs. Saruman, combat in this game is more likely to resemble Merlin vs. Madam Mim, as characters shift from phoenix to amoeba to dragon to eagle in their attempts to best their opponents.

The rulebook is well-presented, which is a necessity, in view of the complexity of the characters and their activities. A step-by-step format leads the player by the hand through filling out the intricate character record sheet.

Unfortunately, the game has some serious problems. The limited scope of the game does not justify the complexity of play. Rolling initiative in DUEL ARCANE can take as long as playing out an entire round of *Wizard*. The game mechanics, with unusual dice rolling methods (where, before, have you ever rolled a 3/7ths die?) and erratic flow of play, can be frustrating. Movement, distance, and speed are abstracted; there is no tactical display or rules for counters or miniatures. Combat between more than two magicians is next to impossible to perform.

I can't recommend DUEL ARCANE as a

ABBREVIATIONS

AC = armor class
AD&D = *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*
AH = The Avalon Hill Company
APA = amateur press association (sometimes action point allowance)
BEM = bug-eyed monster
CHA (or CHR) = charisma
CON = constitution
CPM = control process monitor
c.p. = copper piece(s)
CR = credit(s)
C&S = *Chivalry and Sorcery*
CRT = combat results table (sometimes cathode ray tube, i.e., TV screen)
d = die (3d6 means three 6-sided dice)
D&D = *Dungeons and Dragons*
DM = dungeon master (sometimes die modifier)
DX (or DEX) = dexterity
EHP = evil high priest
e.p. = experience point(s) (sometimes electrum piece(s))
EPT = *Empire of the Petal Throne*
FBI = Flying Buffalo, Inc.
FGU = Fantasy Games Unlimited
FRP(G) = fantasy role-playing (game)
GAMA = Games Manufacturers Association
GDW = Games Designers' Workshop
GM = game master
g.p. = gold piece(s)
h.p. = hit point(s)
HTK = hits to kill
IQ (or INT) = intelligence
K = kilo-bytes of memory
LGM = little green men
LK = luck
MA = movement allowance (sometimes magical/military/mechanical aptitude/ability)
MR = monster rating
MU = magic user
NPC = non-player character
OSI = Ohio Scientific
PBM = play by mail
PET = Personal Electronic Transactor (by Commodore)
POW = power
RAM = random-access memory
ROM = read-only memory
S&T = *Strategy and Tactics*
SF&F = science fiction and fantasy
SIZ = size
s.p. = silver piece(s)
SPI = Simulations Publications, Inc.
SR = saving roll (sometimes strike rank)
ST (or STR) = strength
T&T = *Tunnels and Trolls*
TFG = Task Force Games
TFT = *The Fantasy Trip*
TRS = Tandy-Radio Shack
TSR = TSR Hobbies, Inc. (formerly Tactical Studies Rules)
UPP = Universal Personality Profile
WIS = wisdom
ZOC = zone of control

game unto itself; it's playable, but not worth the trouble. However, there's plenty of food for thought here concerning shapeshifting in various FRP magical systems, especially about totem animals and acquisition of forms. At $3.95, it could be worth the price to GMs who like to tinker with their game systems.

– Aaron Allston

PRIVATEER (First Edition Graphic Art Studios, POB 41320, Sacramento, CA 95842); $12. Designed by Scott Peterson. Box includes roll-up cloth map, 12 wooden counters, one metal token, one 5½" x 17" sheet of rules. 2-4 players; playing time ½ hour. Published 1978.

This game is supposed to represent the conflict and glory of piracy in the semi-mythical Spanish Main. Each player starts with three "ships" in a corner of the map. He is supposed to bring back the "treasure" located on an island in the center. Movement is controlled by dice rolls. Combat is even simpler – when you land on an enemy ship, it sinks.

PRIVATEER's greatest asset is its beautiful and durable components. The map and counters are full-color. They even smell like the sea, and are easily worth $12. Admiring the components, it is almost possible to forget that there is practically no strategy to this game.

Simple, but not dull, PRIVATEER takes almost no thought at all. A good game to bring out after the bottle has gone around a couple of times.

– Forrest Johnson

SUPPLEMENTS

THE COMPLEAT TAVERN (Gamelords, 18616 Grossbeck Terr., Gaithersburg, MD 20760); $3.95. Designed by Kerry Lloyd with Richard Meyer. 8½" x 5½" 24-page booklet, 11" x 17" map, sheet of cut-out cardstock furnishings, bagged. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1981.

A hard day's labor of dungeon destruction over, Boffo the Mighty and Drufus Dwarf retire to their favorite roadside inn to unwind with some hard-core drinking and wenching. After some amiable grog guzzling, ol' Drufus decides to try his luck at the house Chuck-a-Luck game. Seeing his hard-earned gold pieces disappear in what is obviously a rigged game, the somewhat tipsy dwarf decides it's clobbering time. A fight ensues, the bouncers attempt to intervene, Boffo comes to the aid of his companion, and suddenly the entire situation has degenerated into a free-for-all brawl. What to do now? The smart gamemaster will pull out his copy of THE COMPLEAT TAVERN and get down to brass tacks (or knuckles). At his fingertips will be guidelines on types and percentages of tavern accomodations, employees and clientele; rules on running games of skill and chance, such as darts, roulette, chuck-a-luck and arm wrestling; statistics on how much liquor can be imbibed by characters and its effects upon them; and – ah, yes – a very nice system for administering free-for-all barroom brawls.

THE COMPLEAT TAVERN has some nice features. The brawling system is for the most part clear and manageable – unless characters get involved in dozens of individual fights all at once. Characters' actions, from throwing roundhouse punches to ducking to grappling, are cross-referenced with opponents' actions (determined by die roll) to obtain damage results for both sides. If you duck, for example, and your opponent kicks, you take triple dam-

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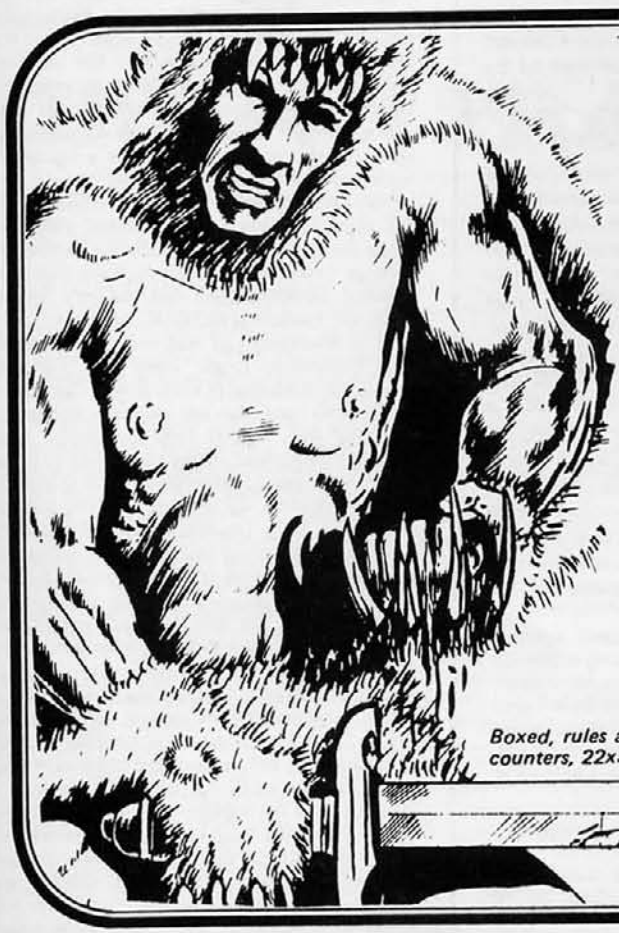

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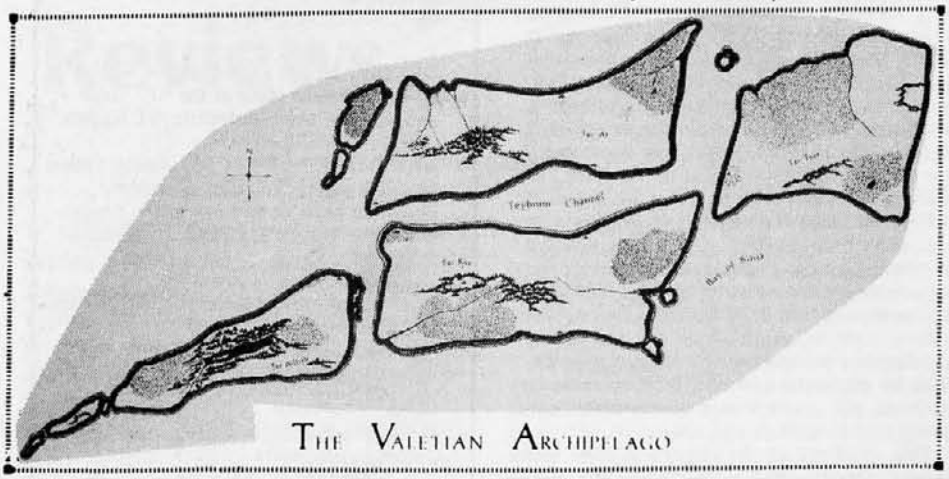

THE VALETIAN ARCHIPELAGO

...with a hissing shriek a second Rask leaped from the outcropping, swinging a short battleaxe. Telegar snapped his shield up to catch the blow but the force knocked him flat on his back a second time. As his shoulders hit he pushed up and over his head with the shield, flinging the Rask away before it could free it's axe for another try. Scrambling to his feet, Telegar faced the Rask who'd already recovered its footing. It brandished its axe warily. Telegar advanced a step and feinted with his sabre tip.

...as he pierced the Rask through, the axe missed his helm and smashed into the Dwarf's shoulder. The mail shirt withstood the edge, but the shoulder was broken.

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age (sorry, Drufus!). A chart at the front of the book translates characteristics from the names used in various FRP systems into those used in TCT (presumably those of *Thieves' Guild* by the same publishers). Several of the dice games are interesting, too, and are almost playable by themselves.

TCT suffers from sloppy editing. One glaring error is under Roulette, in which a large blank space obviously marks where an illustration of a roulette table was to have appeared, making the section useless unless you are already familiar with the game. The section on darts also requires some familiarity with the game as some important explanations are omitted. The reversing of some position ranges on a table in the arm wrestling section may make several readings necessary for a full understanding of the procedure. Also, no real rationale is given for calculating alcohol burn rates, the game use of which is never explained, under Inebriation. Finally, the lack of any real instructions for cutting and assembling the items on the cut-out sheet makes this component next to worthless.

In spite of its flaws, however, THE COMPLEAT TAVERN should prove a valuable play aid to those FRP gamemasters who haven't the time or inclination to create from scratch every aspect of their fantasy worlds – and it can even be adapted to such diverse systems as *Traveller* and *Villains & Vigilantes*.

– William A. Barton

MERCHANTS & MERCHANDISE (Paranoia Press); $3.50. Designed by Donald P. Rapp and Chuck Kallenbach II. Approved for use with *Traveller*. One 5½" x 8½" booklet. Number of players and playing time variable. Published 1981.

What *Mercenary* did for the Army and Marines and *High Guard* did for the Navy, MERCHANTS & MERCHANDISE does for the Merchant Service. The first half of the book is a complete *Mercenary*-type character generation system for merchants. The second half introduces 18 new items: weapons, ships, medical aids, robots, computers – even a transporter *ala Star Trek*.

MERCHANTS & MERCHANDISE is, for the most part, extremely clear and well-organized. Several useful new skills are introduced, such as Trade & Speculation, Vacc Suit Maintenance, Security and Legal. As only the new skills are explained in M&M, however, ownership or knowledge of not only basic *Traveller* but *Mercenary*, *High Guard* and Paranoia's *Scouts & Assassins* is vital. Some elements of assignment resolution are unique – assignments may last one, two or even four years. And a licensing procedure allows characters to receive additional skills – or grounds them if they fail the examination. Guidelines are even provided on how to learn Transporter skill. Some of the new items of equipment are quite interesting, too (but note: some are only available at Tech-16 and above, i.e., outside the Imperium). I especially like the new computers which can have specific personalities impressed upon them.

MERCHANTS & MERCHANDISE has few flaws. Explanations of two of the new skills, Jump Drive and Legal, were omitted from the first printing, but an errata sheet is now available from Paranoia for a SASE. There is no gunnery skill for M&M merchants, the rationale being (I learned from correspondence with designer Don Rapp) that the Navy provides gunners to the Merchant Service in times of war, etc. So if you desire a merchant character with gunnery skill, you're stuck with Book 1 char-

acters (unless the character learns the skill *after* leaving the service). There is some confusion, too, as to exactly when a -8DM for unskilled persons attempting to operate a Transporter is applied. My correspondence with Paranoia has yet to clear this up.

No *Traveller* player should pass this one up.

– William A. Barton

PIECES OF EIGHT (FGU) $4.50. Designed by Gerald Seypura, Patrick Stevens, and Scott Bizar. One 8½" x 11" rulebook. Expansion kit and scenarios for *Skull and Crossbones*. Playing time indefinite. Published 1980.

This is a set of expansion rules for FGU's pirate role-playing game. Mentioned in this volume are rules for voodoo, Indian characters and NPCs, guidelines for doctors, new rules for ships, and three game scenarios.

I personally am in favor of this supplement; it marks a step toward fleshing out the extremely gaunt *Skull and Crossbones* game system.

Because it is consistent in organization and method with *Skull and Crossbones*, though, it shares some of the same flaws, notably sketchy, simplistic writing. This supplement is useful only with the parent RPG. It should have been included in the basic game. And it will still take a few more supplements of this nature before *Skull and Crossbones* is really an adequate system.

Recommended to those who have bought and liked the original RPG. Consider, though: if *Skull and Crossbones* is akin to a 16-chapter book with 8 chapters missing, and each of these supplements provides 1 or 2 of the missing chapters, this will become an expensive game.

– Aaron Allston

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST (Judges Guild); $3.50. Designed by Michael Mayeau. Approved for Dungeons & Dragons. 16-page 8½" x 11" booklet. Solitaire; playing time 1-2 hours. Published 1979.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST is a solitaire dungeon scenario designed to accommodate from 1-4 1st or 2nd level characters of any class or race. It's called SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST because it's a good way to get rid of any really weak 1st or 2nd level characters.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST uses a page and number solitaire system, similar to Metagaming's Microquest series. Thieves, Assassins, Monks, Rangers, and Paladins go through the dungeon as fighters. However, each gets a special ability because of his class. Clerics, Druids, Illusionists, and Magic Users are limited to using spells. The use of magic items is restricted.

The scenario is a good way for low to average beginning characters to gain e.p.'s, treasure, magic items, or even a chance to improve their characteristics. Although good for weak characters, SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST is a breeze for stronger-than-average characters. The dungeon is very simple, making mapping unnecessary. Lastly, the pages include a lot of unneeded paragraphs – you never run into them unless you happen to go to the wrong number. Instant death for your character is a little too high a price to pay just because you happened to misread the directions.

If you want an easy way to advance characters to 3rd or 2nd level, along with grabbing treasure and magic items along the way, get SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST. But if you want a real challenge stick to your local DM.

– Patrick V. Reyes

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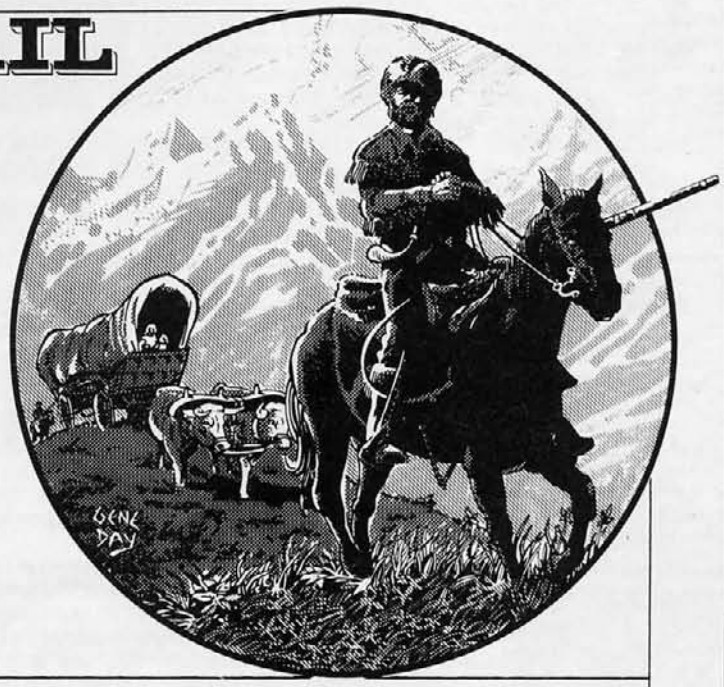

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THE VANGUARD REACHES (Paranoia Press); $3.50. Designed by Chuck Kallenbach II. Approved for use with *Traveller*. One 6" x 8½" 26-page booklet with 11" x 17" sector map insert. Published 1981.

THE VANGUARD REACHES is Paranoia Press' first approved-for-*Traveller* star sector. It lies to spinward of the Imperium (2 sectors spinward and one rimward of the Spinward Marches) and encompasses 16 new subsectors and several client and independent star states. These include Zhodani, Imperial, Aslan, Vargr and even Solomoni client states and the independent Altarean Confederation and Eslyat Magistracy, the latter two populated by the furry, humanoid Murians and the amphibious Eslyat respectively. VANGUARD REACHES presents information on each individual planet per subsector in essentially the same format as GDW's *The Spinward Marches*, supplying name, universal planetary profile and other pertinent data. One page is devoted to each subsector, with supplemental information located in the library data section. The insert map clearly delineates each subsector, locating specific planets, jump routes, capitals and other items of interest, such as the Helix Nebula.

VANGUARD REACHES has several features of interest to the devoted *Traveller* player. The sector is a veritable melting pot of the races of the *Traveller* universe. The proximity of so many different states can spice up any campaign, as can the presence of such constructs as the ringworld of Alsan Tenloe and a (Dyson) sphereworld, Varan's Planet in the Trelyn subsector. Also of note is a Zhodani research station studying the remains of an "ancient slaver race." The absence of individual subsector maps opposite the planetary data threw me at first, but I've found the complete sector pull-out map more useful than the individual maps, especially when traveling between subsectors. All subsector boundaries are clearly marked on the map so there's no confusion as to where a ship is as can happen with Judges Guild's *Ley Sector*.

The only problems I found in VANGUARD REACHES were minor. On some of the subsectors, the planetary data ran so long it was apparently necessary to place comments on the subsector itself back with the library data, causing a bit more page flipping than I would have liked. And I could have wished for even more information, greedy soul that I am, on the Murians, the Eslyat, the tantalizingly mentioned-but-not-elaborated-upon serpentine Bolth and other aspects of this part of the galaxy.

I highly recommend THE VANGUARD REACHES to all *Travellers* looking for new and varied ports of call. Paranoia Press has produced another very professional item in this supplement and has demonstrated itself as a company to keep an eye on in the future for further *Traveller*-related releases.

– *William A. Barton*

PLAY AIDS

CASTLE BOOK I (Judges Guild); $2.75. Designed by Bob Bledsaw, Bill Davis, and Marc Holmer. Play aid approved for D&D. One 64-page 8½" x 11" booklet. Published 1978.

Fifty castles of varying shapes and sizes are represented in this booklet. Each castle is mapped out in grey on thick, white, seven-millimeter hex paper. Six pages of tables for the random determination of wall characteristics and defenses, moat creatures, siege engines, and garrisons have been included. There is also a set of tables for determining the owner of the castle and his or her followers. The tables can produce some bizarre results unless care is taken. A help-

ful four-page castle index is located in the front of the booklet.

Castle sizes range from small walled keeps and towers to enormous fortresses and walled towns. There is no scale; the DM must supply his own.

The CASTLE BOOK has many interesting ideas in it. For the price, it's a bargain.

– Kurt Butterfield

VILLAGE BOOK I (Judges Guild); $2.75. Designed by Bill Davis and Marc Summerlott. Play aid approved for D&D. One 64-page 8½" x 11" booklet. Published 1978.

Within the pages of this booklet forty-eight small villages are clearly mapped out in grey on seven millimeter hex paper. The layout of each village is believable and well planned. The surrounding terrain is left purposefully sketchy so that the referee may fit the village into his own campaign with no difficulty at all. There are also nine pages of helpful tables for the random generation of things such as population, technological level, wall defenses, and shops. There's even a large set of tables for randomly naming your villages. All of these tables must be used with great care and discretion on the part of the referee as some rather strange results can pop up if caution is not exercised. I recommend that the referee just choose from the tables instead of bothering to roll the dice. In the end it'll probably make more sense and save the poor DM constant dice rolling.

If you're one of those judges who hates to spend a lot of time mapping and planning out a village, or if you often find yourself needing one on the spur of the moment, then this booklet is for you.

– Kurt Butterfield

COMPUTER GAMES

ATTACK FORCE (Big Five Software); $15.95. Cassette for the 16K TRS-80 Level I Model II. ($17.95 for 32K disk.) One player; playing time 15 minutes. Cannot be saved. Published 1980.

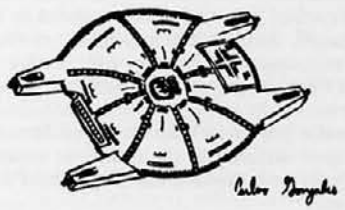
Your defending ship accelerates around a post as the enemy ram-ships twist and turn in the playing field. Their flagship initially hides in a safe area off to one side of the screen, occasionally shooting bolts your way. As your points increase you find your own ship moving more slowly and there are more flagships to deal with. Gradually you find yourself cornered, then overrun by ramships or blasted by a flagship and the screen clears for your next ship.

This machine language program has the usual wonderful Big Five graphics and sound. The program keeps track of the ten best scores to date and neatly handles the complexity of noninstantaneous acceleration. The tactics of the computer in trying to overwhelm you are generally quite reasonable and I find the ever-mounting pressure as your score increases prevents the game from becoming stale.

The only problem I might mention is playbalance. You get one extra player ship for every 10,000 points. This is too tough for most players. Some number around 7,000 might make for a better game.

This is another strong entry in the Big Five line and I strongly recommend it for any arcade buff.

–J. Mishcon



FLYING SAUCERS (Radio Shack); $9.95. Tape for 4K Level II TRS-80. 10 levels of play. One player; playing time 2-3 minutes per game. Published 1979.

The object of FLYING SAUCERS is to destroy as many alien saucers as possible in the allotted time. The saucers fly across the screen attempting to escape your shots. Occasionally a "super saucer" comes across the screen, and when it is hit it causes all other saucers on the screen to explode. At the bottom of the screen the score, misses, shots, hits, and time left are displayed. When a player fires and misses he is penalized. A score of 400 will earn extra time.

The graphics are excellent. The missiles can be guided while in flight. The player can also have multiple shots on the screen at any given point in the game. The game also forces the player to make a direct hit. Otherwise, the missile will bounce off the saucer.

Unfortunately, the display is too busy. The player often can't tell if he got a hit. There is no sound. The game also gets boring after a while because it's too easy.

Overall, FLYING SAUCERS is OK. However, I cannot recommend it because there is a better game with the same theme (and price!) on the market, *Air Raid* (reviewed TSG 30).

–Glenn Mai

MONEY MADNESS (Instant Software); $9.95. 16K cassette for the TRS-80. One or two players; playing time 1 hour up. Published 1980.

Two programs, *Millionaire* and *Timber Baron*, are in this package. The object of *Millionaire* is to parlay $1000 into a million within 15 years. You can buy and sell properties, trade stocks and bonds, and sell products. *Timber Baron* is a simulation of the lumber business. You start with four million dollars and attempt to increase your net worth by buying, growing, cutting and selling timber. Forest fires, droughts, and labor strikes are some of the problems with which you will have to cope.

Timber Baron is interesting. You can compete against another player or the computer. Skill and some luck are needed to beat the computer. Timber rights and land are sold at auction. Learning how much to bid is challenging. Deciding when to trim, selectively cut, or clear cut the trees gives you the feel of managing your company.

Neither of these programs has sound or graphics. *Millionaire* soon becomes tedious since the major activity is accepting or rejecting randomly generated bids for your production.

For those interested in a business simulation, I recommend this package. Many single programs cost more. While *Timber Baron* is of primary interest, you may also enjoy a few games of *Millionaire*.

– Bruce Campbell

STAR WARRIOR (Automated Simulations); $39.95. Designed by J. W. Connelley. Cassette for TRS-80 Level II 16K, box, instruction manual, map and command chart. (Disk version available for the 32K TRS-80 and 48K Apple.) One player; 10-40 minutes. Cannot be saved. Published 1980.

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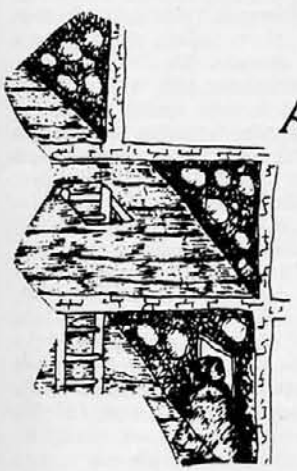

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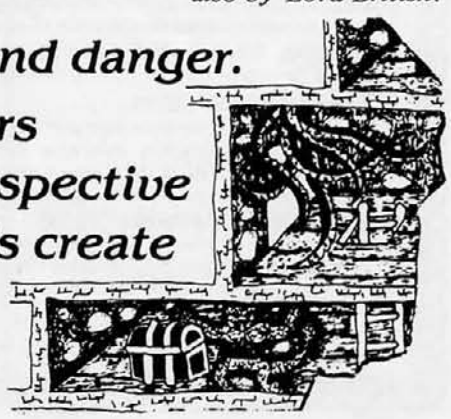

For Apple II with 48K and Applesoft R.O.M.

Available only through local computer stores.

is STAR WARRIOR. As a member of the Furies ("good" mercenaries) your mission is either to create a diversion (Scenario One), or to find and kill the evil ruler of the planet of Fornax (Scenario Two). Being a Fury you get to choose from three different powersuits each armed with an assortment of deadly weapons (or customize a suit if you have disk). There are five levels of difficulty.

These five levels are just an example of all the choices available to the player. During play, the program allows the player to input 20 different commands (6 movement commands, 6 combat commands, and 8 special commands). The game also asks you how long you wish to play. The graphics are also good (much better than the *Dunjonquest* graphics for TRS-80). Sound is optional; it adds excitement, but slows play. The best feature is the sighting "rules." You must sight the enemy and they must sight you: thus you can be fired on be an unseen enemy.

The biggest problem with STAR WARRIOR is once a command is entered it can't be recalled. It is also difficult, in the cassette version, to determine if you are in flight or on the ground.

If you have the money buy the game; if you don't have the money, get the money and buy the game. Highly recommended to any wargamer or arcade buff.

– Glenn Mai

STELLAR ADVENTURE (Software Innovations, 320 Melbourne Rd., Great Neck, NY 11021); 16K cassette $14.95, 32K disk $19.95. Program by Stephen Flitman for the TRS-80. One player; playing time 2 or 3 hours. Twenty levels of play. Cannot be saved. Published in 1980.

Your tiny spacecraft wends its way through hyperspace. The player garners points for landing on planets, discovering artifacts, and fighting off the Kyraxan fighters and dreadnoughts. There are all sorts of clever little obstacles to overcome. You will enjoy escaping the dread clutch of the hyperspace storm, and be pleased with the view as you drop below the event horizon into the black hole. There are bases to land on and planets to orbit. Generally, it all looks like a five-year mission to go where no man has gone before.

The game's strongest points are in its graphics and execution. The Kyraxan dreadnought looks threatening. The alien city on the plain is well done. Having the graphics and movement done in machine language gives the game a "you are there" flavor. The Kyraxan fighters cannot be lost by simply diving into the next quadrant. The little devils pursue even if you slip into hyperspace.

The weak points are substantial, however. There are a couple of program bugs which can leave afterimages of your ship as you try to land. A player can rack up points by landing over and over on the same planet. Only one treasure actually does anything for you, and in all the games I played I never managed to find the blasted thing. Most important, once the basic techniques of landing and combat are learned, there are no new problems to challenge you.

For the price I feel this is a good buy. Certainly you will enjoy the first few hours of play. In its present state, I don't believe I'd call it a classic.

– Jon Mishcon

TIME TRAVELER (Krell Software, 21 Milbrook Dr., Stony Brook, NY, 11790); $24.95. Cassette for the TRS-80, Apple II, and PET. One player; playing time many hours. Cannot be saved. Published in 1980.

You are a time traveler who is attempting to acquire 14 "magic" rings in 14 different eras of history. The rings give you powers far beyond those of mortal men but the time machine is on the blink, so you can't count on staying for a definite period of time in any one era. Victory is achieved by bringing all 14 rings back to the time machine laboratory.

The best features of this adventure are the use of a map and good period descriptions to try and give one the feeling he is wandering in a far time. How would you like to try to bribe your way out of prison in France 1789? How about stirring the masses in Rome 50 BC?

TIME TRAVELER unfortunately fails in two critical areas. First, the four pages of documentation leave too much out. You'll play a long time just learning the parameters of persuasion, combat, and what-have-you. There is no hint who you are or why you're doing what you're doing. Second, other than the descriptions, it doesn't seem to make any difference whether you're in Egypt 1350 BC or Germany 1942. Lastly, long games that can't be saved are frustating.

Overall I'd say this game has some great ideas but fails to give the player enough information so that you can just sit down and enjoy playing. Those who delight in delving into a long game may find this enjoyable. I'd recommend you wait for their next game.

– Jon Mishcon

CONTEMPORARY GAMES

FIFTH CORPS; THE SOVIET BREAKTHROUGH AT FULDA and HOF GAP: THE NURNBERG PINCER (SPI); $9.95 each. Designed by Jim Dunnigan and Charles Kamps. Vols. 1 & 2 in the CENTRAL FRONT SERIES. Each boxed with one 22" x 34" four-color map, one 8-page 8¼" x 11" standard rules book, one exclusive rules booklet, and one die. FIFTH CORPS has 200 die-cut counters; HOF GAP has 400. Playing time from two to 20 hours, depending on scenario. Published 1980.

It's quite a concept: take all of West Germany, map it out at a 1:250,000 scale in ten separate maps, and then build a series of games around each map. When the series is complete, you have a battalion/regiment simulation of a probable Warsaw Pact attack on NATO forces. This is SPI's third try with a US/Soviet conflict in Central Europe (previous efforts including *NATO* and *The Next War*).

The game system is built around operation points (used for movement and initiating combat) which basically represent time, and friction points which accumulate from expending operation points, initiating combat, and as combat results. Each player may have an unlimited number of phases per turn; the turn ends when both players finally pass. Six friction points and a unit is dead.

Despite the detailed point system, it's basically move-fight. If either the Soviets or the NATO forces want to burn themselves out quickly with additional moving and fighting, they can. The chrome is lavish, including electronic counter-measures (ECM), chemicals, and tactical nuclear weapons. The Soviets clearly have the more interesting play with offensive momentum, *blitzkrieg*-type options, and some interesting special rules for a first-turn surprise effect. The NATO types are pretty well committed to a "plug the line" role, awaiting their reinforcements. Later volumes will probably include some of the REFORGER deployments, allowing NATO counter-offensive capabilities.

CENTRAL FRONT is a "simulation" and strictly for the hardcore NATO types. The mechanics take some getting used to, and even though plenty of scenarios are available in the current games, the thing should be approached as a 10-map monster to be fully realized – with a final price tag probably in excess of $100. It's SPI's best effort to date in this area, and the intended audience should be well pleased.

– Nick Schuessler

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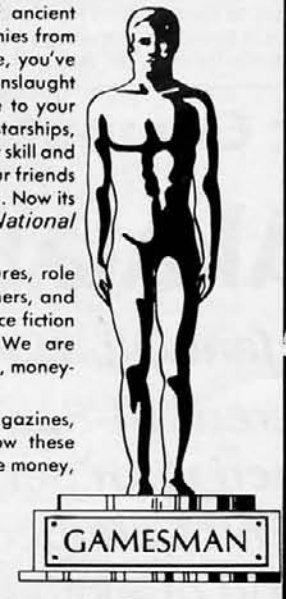

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PUBLICATIONS

GAMER'S GUIDE. Published by Brian E. Carmody (Hawkins Corner Rd., RR 1, Box 224, Lee Ctr., NY 13363). No cover price; subscriptions $12 per year (6 issues). 20 8½" x 11" pages, plus cover. First issue March-April 1980.

This is a new magazine dedicated largely to reviews (three historical, two fantasy, one SF), a "spotlight" article on Nova Game Designs, the Origins ballot and information on the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts & Design, and two blank pages (?!). Future issues will include a "Gamer's Classified" section – 50 words or less, for free.

With so many games on the market (including many which shouldn't be), there's always room for more reviews. This magazine is less polished than *Richard Berg's Review of Games* (reviewed in issue 37) but follows the same general philosophy and offers more reviews for the money. The "spotlight" is also a nice feature; company news is a good thing. Quality of the reviews in this issue varied; the *Magic Realm* review was forthright and complete, for instance, but a couple of the others had a very low signal-to-noise ratio. The humorous "Xerxes Pendragon" reviews used as fillers were a nice touch.

Weak points: Production is semi-amateur – but this is, after all, Issue No. 1. Those blank pages were distressing, and some of those reviews needed a *lot* of editing. This looks to be aimed at maximum information with minimum gloss, which is OK if neatly done. I look for issue 2 to be better.

I give it a guarded recommendation. If your budget is very limited and you want a variety of subjects covered, then one of the "standard" game magazines might serve you better at a lower cost per page. But if *all* you want is reviews, or if you can afford a number of subscriptions, give GAMER'S GUIDE a try.

– *Steve Jackson*

BOOKS

THE BEST OF BOARD WARGAMING (Hippocrene Books); $16.95. Edited by Nicky Palmer. 200 5½" x 8½" pages, hardbound. Published 1981.

This is a sequel to (or perhaps it would be better to say an expansion of) the author's *Comprehensive Guide to Board Wargaming*. It leads off with several introductory chapters on different facets of boardgaming, follows with 107 mostly capsule-sized reviews, and ends up with a breakdown of games by type – recommendations for quick games, games of various periods, the editor's listing of game companies, magazines, and sources.

The introductory chapters are the most interesting part of the book. Palmer has been gaming for quite a while, and he thinks about the games as he plays them. His comments on design philosophy and "honest" vs. "dishonest" design are valuable reading.

Regrettably, though, this is not the "essential handbook for all levels of players" that the jacket blurb calls it. For openers, it does not even try to cover RPGs – it is, as its title says, about boardgaming. But it doesn't cover boardgaming well enough. It's badly out of date and incomplete. "Closing date" for material was spring 1980, so it's already a year behind . . . and some of the listings are much older than that. Example: The bibliography listing for TSG makes it clear that Palmer hasn't seen a copy of this magazine since 1977; he lists it as a pocket-sized publication of "Metagaming Concepts." (And Metagaming dropped the "Concepts" from its name years ago, a detail which has been noticed by everyone except the SPI magazines and the British publications.) Eon and Gamescience are totally missing from the list of publishers, while Task Force is, for some reason, shown as a subsidiary of Judges Guild. The games missing from the listings are legion. A book that omits (for example) *Star Fleet Battles, Cosmic Encounter*, the *Traveller*-related boardgames, *WarpWar*, and *GEV* – and passes over *Stellar Conquest* and the *StarForce* trilogy with a single bare mention – isn't about the "best," no matter what the title. And the short chapter on computer games gives no evidence that Mr. Palmer has actually seen any example other than *Starweb*; it's devoted mostly to speculation about computer assistance for paper games.

The reviews that *were* included weren't what they should have been. They have a very authoritative air, and include 1-100 ratings for each game on excitement level, rules clarity, complexity, realism, and solitaire playability. But they totally omit the designer for each game (irritating) and the publisher's price (unforgivable!) Evident in the reviews is a bias against short games and toward "monsters." This may not be bad – Mr. Palmer is entitled to his opinions! – but it's out of step with the hobby.

This one belongs in the library of the game club, collector, or serious designer. As a reference work for the average gamer, fantasy/SF or otherwise, I couldn't recommend it. Consumer Guide's *Complete Book of Wargames* (reviewed, TSG 32) is bigger, better, and half the price.

– *Steve Jackson*

NONEXISTENT GAMES

BANANAQUEST (Gougem Games); $8.95. Designed by Ervin Earwacker. Second Edition. Boxed (Geomorphic) with 4-page 8½" x 11" rule booklet (sometimes less), 10 pages of errata, 2 color (black and white) 8½" x 11" maps, 98½ counters, 2½ million bananas, and 2 three-sided dice. Published once upon a time.

BANANAQUEST is a two player (or in case of schizophrenia, one player) game. One player takes the role of Hans Helmschtucker, a German infantry soldier. Hans has volunteered to get food to feed the starving German Sixth Army. Somewhere in the underground underworld underneath Stalingrad, the Russians have a supply depot with 2½ million bananas. Hans' job is to find the depot and bring the bananas home. The other player takes the side of the Russians who try to eat as many bananas as possible before Hans finds the depot.

BANANAQUEST has its good points. It's just that no one has found them yet.

BANANAQUEST has its bad points. The rules are still incomplete. (Maybe another 200 pages of errata will be sufficient.) The map is in two colors. What about people who are colorblind? But the biggest flaw of BANANAQUEST is the 2½ million bananas. The game I purchased had been sitting on the game store's shelf for over two years. Can you imagine how bananas smell after two years?

BANANAQUEST is an excellent game for deranged, psychopathic banana lovers of this world. If you're one of them, this game is for you. On the other hand, if you're a creative gamer like myself you can also get something out of the game. If you glue the 2 three-sided dice together, you'll have a semi-usable six-sided die.

– *Paul Manz*

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The United States Zip code system has been divided into four separate areas. Area 1 codes are 0 and 1; Area 2 codes are 2, 3, 4, and the Canadian entries. Area 3 codes are 5, 6, and 7; Area 4 codes are 8, 9, and foreign entries. One winner from each area will be chosen and notified by mail and/or phone. All Entries Must Be postmarked no later than midnight August 15th, 1981. This offer VOID on Venus and Mercury. All entries become the property of Phobos Publishing and cannot be returned.

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Letters

After some of the various "articles" I've seen in various zines regarding various games/companies who *just happen* to advertise in said zine, where the review or article reads like another advertisement, it's certainly nice to see you take a chance and advise everyone on the status of *Lords of Valetia*! . . .

Thank you for publishing Prof. M.A.R. Barker's letter; I've long considered EPT to be one of the best role-playing games around.

Mark Goldberg
Chicago, IL

Since I'm not into D&D, I just breezed through Aaron's article (issue 38), but *Time War* may find its way into my collection because of the review. In fact, except that the fiction is so good now, TSG is primarily reviews to me. In more than a few cases I've bought games because the subject or mechanics appealed to me and they got good (not necessarily favorable, but unbiased and complete) reviews in TSG. In fact, I consider TSG recommendations just behind the recommendation of a friend who played the games. (It's getting too expensive to go on hype or box art anymore.)

Ron Fisher
Asheville, NC

I enjoyed the article, "Notes for Novice Dungeon Masters" in TSG 35. Very useful for the novices at whom it was aimed, and containing many an "Oh yeah!" for more experienced DMs.

Having seen this article, I am inspired to suggest a few more sources. There are a number of magazines oriented toward history, archaeology, natural history, etc., which can be helpful. The most obvious of these is *National Geographic*. Any self-respecting library should have back issues and index volumes.

And (this one's a bit more obscure), the books of David Macaulay. This last Christmas, milady Mamazoon brought me his books, *Castle* and *Pyramid*. I advise any game masters to seek them out (and his other books, *Cathedral, City*, and *Underground*) and check them out. Though classified as children's books, you will find them interesting, if not useful.

Ben V. Kloepper
St. Louis, MO

Thank you for the recent "plug" in your magazine of my new magazine, *Wargame Commentaries*. However, my magazine is NOT open to a general subscription. I operate privately and I send out copies on a preferred basis. Therefore, readers, do NOT send me an order, for I shall have to return it. Thank you.

R. A. Franz
Winchester, VA

Your "Cardboard Heroes" are the answer to a long-standing problem! I'm a D&D enthusiast and a school teacher who has been "spreading the news" for quite a few years now. Games are more fun in three dimensions, but the figures – ! Your product is ideal for my purposes. Thank you! I just bought out the entire fantasy shipment at the hobby shop.

Henry A. Ott
New York, NY

I appreciate your encouraging my reviews on "off the wall" and hard to find games, but sometimes you can get yourself into a very disappointing predicament. A case in point, as you can see: there are no reviews included with this letter. This is mainly because the game I had intended to review, *Hyper-Battle*, was so bad that it wasn't worth the effort.

This game may even have some unique ideas – but they are lost in its terrible rules. From what I have gathered, the players are supposed to use simultaneous movement and fire, but other than that, I can understand very little. There are no vectors or gravity effects that would have made the game more interesting. Nothing new is attempted.

I would hate to see someone waste good money on this game.

Jerry Epperson
Omaha, NE

Errata

1980 GAME SURVEY

In the final pasteup of issue 38 (see "Where We're Going" in this issue) a column of type was omitted from the listing of survey results. Not good . . . At any rate, here are the missing numbers.

SF BOARDGAMES

Cosmic Encounter	6.5 (6.9%)
Dune	6.5 (5.0%)
Space Future	6.5 (41.3%)
Quirks	6.0 (33.0%)
Dr. Who	5.0 (30.7%)
4th Dimension	4.5 (13.8%)

SF RPG

Traveller	7.8 (1.4%)
Space Opera	7.0 (17.0%)
Space Quest	6.1 (29.4%)
Villains & Vigilantes	5.9 (15.6%)
Gamma World	5.7 (4.1%)
John Carter	5.7 (6.4%)
Space Patrol	5.7 (19.7%)
Starships & Spacemen	5.3 (16.5%)
Superhero 2044	5.3 (13.8%)

SF RPG SUPPLEMENTS

Twilight's Peak	8.3 (19.3%)
76 Patrons	7.5 (21.5%)
Bright Face/Mithril	7.4 (15.1%)
High Guard	7.4 (6.4%)
Mercenary	7.4 (5.0%)
Research Station Gamma	7.3 (11.0%)
Shadows/Annic Nova	6.7 (17.0%)
Tancred	6.6 (26.1%)
Sector 57	6.5 (30.7%)
Dra'k'ne Station	6.1 (13.3%)
Ley Sector	6.0 (22.0%)
Encounters in the Phoenix Quadrant	5.8 (19.3%)
Pen-Latol's World	5.7 (28.4%)
Spacefarer's Guide to Alien Monsters	5.5 (18.3%)
The Evening Star	2.0 (34.4%)

FANTASY TACTICAL GAMES

Melee	7.8 (1.4%)
Wizard	7.8 (3.2%)
Swashbuckler	6.8 (8.7%)
King of the Mountain	6.6 (32.6%)
Arms Law	6.5 (36.2%)
Warlock	6.0 (25.2%)
Valkenburg Castle	5.8 (11.0%)
Hero	5.6 (14.7%)
Stomp	5.5 (9.2%)

FANTASY STRATEGIC GAMES

War of the Ring	6.8 (4.6%)
Divine Right	6.3 (8.3%)
Lords of the Middle Sea	6.3 (19.7%)
Dragon Lords	6.0 (24.8%)
Spellbinder	5.7 (18.3%)
Lords & Wizards	5.4 (24.3%)
Swords & Sorcery	5.3 (5.5%)
The Beastlord	4.8 (12.8%)
Zargo's Lords	4.8 (32.7%)
Demons	4.7 (6.9%)
Barbarian Kings	4.5 (11.0%)
Knights & Knaves	4.3 (32.6%)

FANTASY BOARD GAMES

Junta	6.8 (22.0%)
Wizard's Quest	6.1 (7.8%)
Dungeon	5.6 (4.6%)
Death and Destruction	5.0 (27.5%)
Fantastic Encounters	5.0 (38.1%)
Mythology	4.8 (14.2%)
Magic Realm	4.6 (6.9%)
Darkover	4.1 (12.8%)
Titan	4.0 (30.3%)
Hammer of Thor	3.3 (33.1%)

FANTASY RPG

The Fantasy Trip	7.7 (2.3%)
RuneQuest	7.3 (3.7%)
Land of the Rising Sun	7.2 (29.3%)
Thieves' Guild	7.2 (21.1%)
Infinity	6.7 (33.5%)
Advanced Dungeons and Dragons	6.3 (1.8%)
Complete Warlock	6.2 (7.8%)
Chivalry & Sorcery	5.9 (7.8%)
DragonQuest	5.9 (4.1%)
Bushido	5.7 (11.5%)
Odysseus	5.6 (31.2%)
Monsters! Monsters!	5.5 (5.5%)
Tunnels & Trolls	5.4 (3.7%)
Original Dungeons and Dragons	5.4 (2.3%)
DeathMaze	5.2 (6.4%)
High Fantasy	5.1 (22.0%)
Adventures in Fantasy	4.7 (22.0%)
Arduin Grimoire	4.5 (14.7%)

Every four weeks I get a bulletin from the Science Fiction Book Club. Why isn't there a Science Fiction Game Club?

No, really. The industry is growing rapidly enough to support an independent distribution outlet handling all companies' SF and fantasy releases on a club system. Members who join would get a free copy of a MicroGame or some other small-scale introductory game (what SF gaming needs is a good answer to *Napoleon at Waterloo*), and every month or two months thereafter they would get a flyer announcing that month's new release plus mentions of backlist games still available. Members who don't return a form by a certain deadline would automatically be shipped a copy of the featured selection and billed accordingly.

The obvious objection now is, "The companies wouldn't want a club because it would cut into their own sales operations." Maybe, but maybe not. Book publishers don't object to the SF Book Club, because its cheaply-made and cheaply-priced editions appeal to a different market than more expensive hardcovers or cheaper paperbacks. The same strategy might apply to games, if the game club prints its own cheap versions of more expensive games. This is what SPI does with *Strategy & Tactics* magazine; apparently it feels that gamers who like the magazine version of a game will buy the more durable mass-market version, or that the two audiences don't overlap sufficiently to make a difference, or some other reason. Anyway, SPI has shown that a cheap and an expensive version of the same game can coexist.

Another reason why a game club needn't necessarily cut into company sales is that, of necessity, a club would deal in only a specific price range. You couldn't offer *Kung Fu 2100* one month and then *Freedom in the Galaxy* the next – the price range is too wide. The SF Book Club offers two new releases each month as featured selections, with prices totalling about eight or nine dollars; because of the smaller scope of our hobby, a game club would probably only offer one game each month, still in that eight or nine dollar range. (Conveniently, this is the range of complexity for a game that can be learned easily and pretty well "played out" in a month, before the next release arrives.) If the club proved successful, it might gain a large majority of the audience for this mid-level game; but the companies would still have the mini-game and the "monster" game market to themselves.

A third reason why companies wouldn't object to a game club is that they would be paid by the club for the right to market their releases. Designers might have to renegotiate their contracts to provide for benefits from club sale, but companies (particularly smaller companies with inadequate distribution outlets) would just hand over their games to the club for a flat fee and/or royalties, and let the club do all the work of distribution. The nice thing about a club is that there is a certain guaranteed minimum of sales on every release; the SF Book Club never sells less than 20,000 copies of any featured selection, and while games could not achieve such a figure in the near future (if ever), there would still be a floor-figure of sales on every new release.

A game club would have several genuine advantages. It would publicize good games by lesser-known companies. It would recruit new people to the field, just as the Book Club has introduced many people to read science fiction who wouldn't have othewise. It would help large-scale games to reach a wider audience through cheap editions. Eventually it might even give designers a new market for their games; the Book Club sometimes buys collections from writers without an intervening publisher.

However, there are several disadvantages. A new game club would have to have considerable initial capital, since it can expect to operate at a dead loss for the first year or two of operation, until it catches on. Companies would likely be reluctant to permit anyone to produce cheap versions of their games, despite the benefits outlined above. Most importantly, it may prove tough to even *find* one good mid-sized SF or fantasy game to market each month!

But I believe none of these objections are insurmountable. What we're discussing here is essentially the same thing that *Ares* magazine provides each month, with a couple of important differences: (1) a club would offer releases from many different companies; (2) you would have a choice whether to receive a particular game instead of taking the luck of the draw; and (3) you wouldn't have to wade through all that bad fiction every month.

I think the field is about ready for a Science Fiction Game Club. How about you?

Allen Varney
Reno, NV

News & Plugs

Dave Arneson reports that his suit with TSR has finally been settled. Arneson currently has his own company, Adventure Games, Inc., which markets *Adventures in Fantasy*.

METAGAMING NEWS: Metagaming has announced the upcoming release of *The Fantasy Master's Codex*, an index to all Fantasy Trip publications. A new Codex will be issued each year. Price: $9.95. Also to be available is a reference screen for TFT, priced at $2.95.

Other upcoming releases include *Command at Sea, Trojan War, Hitler's War* (historical), *The Air Eaters Strike Back* (a sequel to *Invasion of the Air Eaters*), and *A Fistful of Turkeys*, a "satirical" micro-sized game.

Rumor: An Apple IV computer is currently in development.

We hear rumors of something called *The Glory Game*, evidently as an alternative for those Christian gamers who feel that D&D is "evil."

The Conflict Simulations Games Club (5335 Lester St., Indianapolis, IN 46208) publishes *Combat Zone*. Price: $6/four issues; single copy $2.

Gameshop has changed its name to Nova Game Designs, Inc. Upcoming releases include a number of games based on the *Ace of Aces* system: a WWII air game, another WWI game, *Bounty Hunter* (Old West) and *Crossed Swords* (fantasy). They are also planning to publish a multi-player boardgame, *Axis and Allies*.

Magnetic Fantasies (1626 N. Wilcox No. 403, Hollywood, CA 90028) is "a bi-monthly journal, devoted to the art of Computerized Fantasy Simulations." Price: $2.95/copy.

High Passage is a new magazine devoted to *Traveller*. See ad this issue.

The Armory produces a plastic "dice maze," which takes all the skill out of dice rolling (but keeps them on the table). Prices are $9.95 (small); $19.95 (large); $39.95 (tournament).

Games Workshop has announced three forthcoming releases: *Troll Tavern, Star Hunters* and *Death Cars*.

Judges Guild has a new magazine, *The Imperial Pegasus*, including SF and Fantasy game articles and fiction. Print run 5,000; immediate distribution 3,100. Payment to contributors: $1-$7/page for copy, $2-$10 for art. Editors: Mike Reagan and Harold Kahn.

FGU has bought the following titles from Phoenix Games: *Aftermath* (for release in May), *Elementary, Watson* (expanded version due in June), and *Bushido* (boxed edition for July).

Reilly Associates has released an "Interstellar Trade Ledger" and a "Player Character Chronicle" to add to its line of record sheets and play aids. A pad of 50 sheets of either costs $2.50.

Programma International offers Mychess, a 32K program for the TRS-80. Price: $34.95.

The Prometheus Video Project is a group of SF fans, writers and artists who are seeking to create a new TV series. Queries should be sent with an SASE to: Russell Coody, 3028 Ryan St., Dept. 154, Lake Charles, LA 70601.

The World Space Federation (POB 293, Grandview, MO 64030) is a citizens' group lobbying in support of the space program. Send an SASE for further information.

Automated Simulations has released a package including three of its games – *The Datestones of Ryn, Morloc's Tower* and *Rescue at Rigel*. Price: $49.95.

House of Pilgrim, a new company, has announced the release of the boardgame *Space Raid*.

James B. Lurvey (POB 27, Belcourt, ND 58136) offers the amateur zine *Gamelog*. Price: $7.50/12 issues, or 75 cents/copy.

Calendar

May 1-3: USACON 3. Gaming con for SF&F, RP, and boardgaming at University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL. Contact Leo Vaulin, 5856 Lisloy Dr., Mobile, AL 36608.

May 22-25: GRIMCON III. F/SF gaming con, Oakland Hyatt House, 455 Hegenberger Road, Oakland, CA 94612. Contact P.O. Box 4153, Berkeley, CA 94704.

May 29-31: COMPUTERFEST '81. Computer hobby show. SASE to MAAC, P.O. Box 20205, Columbus, OH 43220.

June 5-7: DALCON '81. Gaming con – several tournaments, dealers, etc. Contact Dalcon '81, 12800 Abrams Rd., Dallas, TX 75243.

June 5-7: PHRINGECON 2. SF fan con, including T&T tournament. Contact PhringeCon, Inc., P.O. Box 128, Tempe, AZ 85281.

June 12-14: MDG MICHICON 10 GAMEFEST. Contact Metro Detroit Gamers, P.O. Box 787, Troy, MI 48099.

June 19-21: STRATACON II. Boardgaming, miniatures, SF, and RPG. Contact G. Patterson, 5373 Commercial St., Vancouver, BC V5P 3N4.

June 26-28: GAME CON ONE. Contact Game Alliance, 481 Ferry St., Salem, OR 97301.

July 3-5: ORIGINS '81: To be held in Dunfee Motel, San Mateo, CA. Contact Origins '81, P.O. Box 5833, San Jose, CA 95150.

July 9-12: 1981 IPMS NATIONAL CONVENTION. Scale model con. SASE to Ed Cameron, 29 Mathew St., South Farmingdale, NY 11735.

July 11-12: MINNESOTA CAMPAIGN FIVE. Contact Mr. Jeff Berry, 343 E. 19th St. Apt. 4B, Minneapolis, MN 55046.

July 16-19: CWA-CON '81. Wargaming & adventure-gaming con. Contact P.O. Box 10397, Ft. Dearborn Station, Chicago, IL 60610.

July 17-19: ODYSSEY '81. Con featuring all kinds of gaming. Sponsored by the UNH Simulations Games Club; for information contact R. Bradford Chase, UNHSGC, Memorial Union Building, Durham, NH 03824.

July 17-20: 9th ANNUAL FLYING BUFFALO CONVENTION. Contact P.O. Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252.

July 23-26. GENCON EAST. Contact at P.O. Box 139, Middletown, NJ 17748.

July 31-August 2: MAINECON. Boardgames, miniatures, FRP. Contact Mr. John Wheeler, Director, Mainecon, 102 Front St., Bath, ME 04530.

July 31-August 2: NANCON 88-IV. General gaming con. Send SASE to Nan's Game Headquarters, 118 Briargrove Center, 6100 Westheimer, Houston, TX 77057.

August 8: DRAGONMEET IV. SF&F gamers con. Chelsea Town Hall, Kings Road, London SW3.

August 8-9: 5th ANNUAL BANROG AREA WARGAMERS CONVENTION. Contact Edward F. Stevens, Jr., 83 N. Main St., Rockland, ME 04841.

August 13-16: GENCON XIV. FRPG & new gaming releases. Contact GenCon XIII, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

September 3-7: DENVENTION TWO. SF con. Contact Denvention Two, P.O. Box 11545, Denver, CO 80211 or (303) 433-9774.

CONVENTION ORGANIZERS – let us know about your con! Free publicity never hurts.

The Good Guys by JD

WHAT NOW PRINCESS?
WELL, FIRST WE...
PUM! POM!
RUN FOR THE SHUTTLE HUNK!! I'LL HOLD THEM OFF!
TAK! TA
TAKK
UH OH! STORMTROOPERS!
TAKE THIS YOU CONCHIFEROUS SWINE!
WAIT ITS O.K., IT WAS ONLY SMELLY!
SUDDENLY!
I'VE COME FOR THE CASE REBEL! PREPARE TO DIE!
ER...
WUUPS!
FZZT!
CLICK!
JDW.
NO! IT CAN'T END LIKE THIS...
BUT, WHAT CAN WE DO
ULP!
I DUNNO... WAIT! LET'S CHECK THE SCRIPT!!
GOOD IDEA!
BUT...
AHA! I KNEW IT! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO HAVE A BIG LASER SWORD FIGHT WITH "FLUKE", NOT US...
THE GOOD GUYS
WHAT! LET ME SEE THAT!... WHY! YOU'RE RIGHT!

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Steve Jackson to the TSG subscribers, greetings –

Four or five years ago, back in the Dark Ages, when I still spent more time playing games than trying to design them, I wasted a couple of weeks making up some bumper stickers. I had a few thousand printed up on heavy vinyl (the kind that outlasts the bumper it's on) . . . and, for a while, I'd sell them at conventions. Paid for my meals that way, anyhow.

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